THE Mystery of Atheism; OR THE DEVICES Made use of To Countenance and Propagate it: Together with the EVIL and DANGER of them. Set forth in several Letters to a Friend.

Wherein is made appear, that 'tis not want of Evidence, but Sincerity that makes Men Atheists.

By the Author of the Mystery of Phanatic[illegible]

Psal. 14. 1. *The Fool hath said in his heart there is no God.*

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The PREFACE.

IF any be desirous to know the occasion of these Letters, he need only look abroad, and may soon see that there is but too much occasion for them: For Atheism is so strangely encreas'd among us of late Years, and grown to that heighth, that like a torrent it overflows the Banks and Boundaries of Laws, and hath almost carried away all Religion before it: So that 'tis high time to use our best Endeavours to stem this Tide, and if possible to put a stop to this overflowing of Ungodlyness.

It hath been a matter hotly disputed in former times, whether there ever was, or could be such an Anomalous Creature as an Atheist; or if any Age had here and there afforded one, he was reputed a Monster or Prodigy, and gaz'd upon as a Wonderful Rarity: But our Age hath put this matter out of Question, and perhaps afforded more than any that hath gone before it; this Monster is now grown familiar, and may every day and almost every where be seen. Atheism in old times was so modest, as not to venture abroad without a Mask or Disguise; but 'tis now become bare-faced, and hath

caſt off all bluſhing and ſhame; and whereas the fool in David's *days only* ſaid in his heart, *in ours he ſpeaks out, and ſays with his Tongue, there is no God.*

'Twill be needleſs to recount here the extream Folly and Danger of Atheiſm, which the Reader will find in ſome meaſure done in the following Letters: If there be a God that made and governs the World, (as there is all the Reaſon in the World from the Make and Management of it to believe there is) what a vile affront muſt it be to Queſtion his Being, and to go about to argue him out of the World, that made and plac'd us in it? This muſt tear up all Religion by the Root, ſubvert the Foundation of human Society, and deſtroy all that Truſt and Confidence we ought to have in him and one another: Yea, the Atheiſt is the moſt groſs and ſilly of all Impoſtors, for he puts a cheat upon himſelf, and not only excludes him from all the Comfort and Happineſs he might hope from ſo lovely a Being, but expoſes himſelf to all that Miſery and Puniſhment, that may be feared from an incenſed Deity.

And yet as ſilly as this is, he is not only willing to be thus groſsly deceiv'd himſelf, but is very buſie to draw in and deceive others, and to make Proſelytes to ſuch a ſenſeleſs and fatal impoſture; by which means the infection of this Evil ſpreads dayly, and the diſtemper is well-nigh become Epidemical.

Now

Now this Mystery of Iniquity working so strongly in our days, and this Spiritual wickedness being again seated in high places, *'twill be requisite (if it may be) both to detect and dethrone it. 'Tis indeed a matter Worthy the inquiry of the best and wisest Men, to search into the bottom of this Evil, that by knowing the Cause, they may the better apply timely Remedies for the Cure of it, before the distemper grow inveterate and incurable; for tho' all sin in general, yet an Atheistical Contempt of God, and boldness in sinning, do more particularly undermine the Peace and Prosperity of a Nation, and more than ordinarily hasten and ripen it for destruction.*

Now tho' there may be some latent Causes of Atheism, that lye more hidden and out of sight, yet there are others that are more visible, and apparently lead to this great Evil: The loosening the Principles of Religion and Government hath certainly a great hand in it; the dissolving the Tyes of Justice and Honesty does not a little contribute towards it, and the breaking the Bonds of Unity and Peace have an easie and natural tendency to it: how much the immodesty and immorality of the Stage hath tended this way, hath been lately shew'd by an excellent Pen; what mischief hath proceeded from that other Stage, I mean the Conventicle, sad experience may inform us; and how much Religion hath suffered by a new Set of Reformers, who are for

Reforming

Reforming all faults but their own, may be dayly ſeen; and this, as all other Myſteries, hath ſome depths and intrigues, which muſt be ſearcht into and laid open, before the evil can be prevented.

'Twas foretold that in the latter days, ſome ſhould put on a Form of Godlineſs, without the Power of it; *and likewiſe that* there ſhould ariſe Scoffers, walking after their own Luſts: *Both theſe Prophecies we may ſee accompliſh'd in our days, in which we find ſome acting very vile things under a Cloak of Religion; and others throwing off all pretenſions to it, breaking thir jeſts upon God and Religion, and making the moſt Sacred and Serious things the Object of their Contempt and Raillery: And both theſe, tho' ſteering different courſes, fall at laſt into the Gulph of Atheiſm, in which many are ſwallowed up, and from whence few return.*

In a Word, Atheiſm is the Completion of Vice and Wickedneſs; in which they all center and terminate; ſo that this ſin when it is finiſhed bringeth forth death, and ſinks Men into everlaſting perdition. This then being an Evil ſo pernicious to the welfare of Mankind, as well as to the Honour of our Maker, 'twill be neceſſary to ſet forth the Arts by which it is diſguiſed and propagated, that we may behold this Monſter in its own ſhape, and be thereby induced to ſhun and deteſt it. Farewel.

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LET-

LETTER I.

SIR,

I Received yours, wherein I find you passionately bewailing the growth of Atheism; and very desirous to know something of the Causes and Cure of it.

I am sufficiently sensible of the Justice of the Complaint, and because this Evil hath so malign an influence, not only on the private but publick Welfare, cannot but commend the Charity of your Request, and therefore shall endeavour something towards your Satisfaction.

1*st*. And here the First and Grand Device of the Atheist, that occurs to our view, is, The casting off the awe and dread of a Deity, the more securely to enjoy and indulge his Lusts: This is indeed the great depth of this Mystery of Iniquity, which must therefore be a little searcht into and unravell'd,

that we may the better ſee the malignity of it.

'Tis moſt certain, that the Looſneſs and Debauchery of mens lives is the prime fundamental Cauſe of all Atheiſm; for Sin and Wickedneſs make a Party againſt Religion, whoſe Chief deſign it is to check and controul them; and where Religion is not ſtrong enough to ſubdue mens Luſts, there mens Luſts will be ſtrong enough to ſubdue their Religion; theſe are contrary ones to the other, and as the one gets ground, the other loſes it: When Vice and Wickedneſs have taken poſſeſſion of the heart, and prevail'd over the Affections, they ſoon draw the Mind over to their Party, and engage it againſt all Religion. Corrupt Practices, naturally lead to Corrupt Principles; and the debauchery of Manners, of courſe, brings on the debauchery of the Mind. That there are ſtrong Propenſities and Inclinations in mens Natures, to wickedneſs and vice, is a thing too ſenſibly felt to need any proof; and that theſe may, and frequently do, wear off and obliterate the Natural Impreſſions of Good and Evil, the Courſe of mens lives too ſadly verifies; and, what a natural tendency

dency this hath to Atheiſm, half an eye may diſcover. For, whilſt men retain any love to Virtue, and keep the maſtery over their Luſts and vile Affections, ſo long they retain their Religion, and keep up a due ſenſe and veneration of the Divine Majeſty! but when they ſtrike off from the love and practice of Virtue, and let looſe the reins to their vitious Inclinations, they naturally run into Irreligion and Atheiſm; for Virtue and Goodneſs being the only Curb to reſtrain this Extravagance, when that is gone, they have nothing left to ſtop them in the Career, and ſo are hurried on headlong into the gulph of Atheiſm. If you obſerve it, Good men are never diſpos'd to Atheiſm; 'tis the grief and abhorrence, but never the Choice of ſuch Perſons: 'Tis only the profligate and prophane, who have ſinn'd away the ſenſe of a Deity, that fly to it for ſhelter: and to give their luſts the freer ſcope, make their laſt reſort to it. Yea, theſe too muſt in a great meaſure un-man themſelves, before they can ſo far degenerate; and in a manner turn Beaſts, before they can turn Atheiſts.

But what influence hath the looſe-

neſs and debauchery of mens lives upon the producing of Atheiſm? Why, Great every way. As,

Firſt, Mens wicked lives make it their Intereſt that there ſhould be no God; and this gives a Biaſs to the mind that ſtrongly draws it into Atheiſm. All ſiin and wickedneſs being repugnant to the Purity and Perfection of a Supreme Being, and contrary to the expreſs Declarations of his Will, muſt neceſſarily incur his diſpleaſure: And tho' Infinite Goodneſs may warn Sinners of the danger, yet Infinite Juſtice cannot ſuffer the wilful Violations of his Authority and Laws to go unpuniſh'd. Now, reſolute and obſtinate Sinners being conſcious how they have affronted ſuch a Being, and thereby rendred themſelves obnoxious to his juſt Indignation and Vengeance, have all the reaſon in the world to dread him; and, if they can, to fly from him; from whom they can have no other than fearful Expectations of Wrath, and the Revelation of Righteous Judgment: And having thus made him their Enemy 'tis plainly become their Intereſt that there ſhould be no ſuch Being. Now Intereſt (you know) hath a mighty

fluen

fluence on mens Inclinations; and as they eaſily believe what makes for them, ſo they are hardly perſwaded to that which makes againſt them: Hence we ſee, that Good men eaſily believe a God, from whom they have well-grounded hopes of Happineſs and a future Reward: whereas wicked men are very hardly brought to it, becauſe they have reaſon only to fear him, and can look for nothing but eternal miſery and deſtruction from him: And if at any time they have any Faith in him, 'tis but like that of the Devils, to believe and tremble. Again,

2*dly*, Mens wicked lives having made it their Intereſt that there ſhould be no God, their next ſtep is to make it their wiſh that there were none. This is another piece of this Myſtery of Iniquity, and a farther advance to Atheiſm: For, the belief of an Incens'd Deity, muſt needs ſit very uneaſie upon the mind; it cannot but fret and gall, and fill it with continual horrour and perplexity: The Senſe of this ſerves to imbitter the Pleaſures of Sin, to put a check upon mens Vices, and will not ſuffer them to enjoy their Luſts in quiet; which being reſolv'd to do, they grow impatient

under this Check: And this makes them desirous to rid themselves of the awe and sense of such an uneasie Being. The good man finds that ease and satisfaction in the sense of a Deity, that he wou'd not for any thing be without it, for it fills him with joy and content now, and gives him Peace and Happiness at the last: Insomuch, that were he to wish himself the Chiefest Good, it would be in the comfort and complacence he feels in the belief of a Deity. Whereas the loose and wicked person, is haunted with perpetual Fears and Terrors; and the disquietude he feels, from the apprehensions of a God, drives him to wish there were no such Being to observe and punish him; and then a small matter will perswade him to it; for, *Facilè credimus, quod volumus*, we easily believe what we long and desire should be true.

3*dly*, And this leads to the third and last step to Atheism, which is, from wishing there were no God, to endeavouring to perswade themselves that there is none; there being an easie and natural transition, from the one to the other: for the Will and Affections have a great sway on the Understanding; and

when

when Intereſt hath engag'd the former, they ſoon draw the latter to their ſide; ſo that what men make their Wiſh, quickly becomes their Choice; and from a deſire to diſcard the Deity, eaſily come to deny and disbelieve him.

But by what Means do they endeavour and effect this? Why,

1. Firſt, They muſter up all their Reaſon and Wit to argue againſt the Being of a God, and ſeek to diſpute him out of the world. To this end, they labour, as well as they can, to weaken the force of all thoſe Arguments that are brought for the proof of a Deity, and make the beſt ſhift they can, either to anſwer or evade them. Again, they magnifie the ſtrength of thoſe Arguments that are brought againſt ſuch a Being: And, (tho' to prove a Negative, in this as in many other caſes, be both irrational and impoſſible, yet) to ſhew their good-will to their Maker, the ſtend'reſt Cavils or Probabilities of this nature ſhall have a mighty force with them; and the ſlighteſt Sophiſtry be advanc'd into Demonſtration. But if this will not do, they endeavour,

2. To baniſh all thoughts of God out of their mind, and to caſt off the re-

membrance of him: Becauſe they cannot ſin quietly for him, they reſolve not to think of him, and therefore put thoſe thoughts far from them that give them this diſturbance. This was the Atheiſts courſe in *David*'s time, who tells us, [*That God was not in all their thoughts*;] yea, that his thoughts were always grievous to them; and therefore they removed them far out of their ſight, that they might have no *fear of him before their Eyes*: And the thoughts of a God that obſerves and records our Actions, and will one day reckon for them, are ſtill irkſom and grievous to impenitent ſinners, which makes them uſe their Art to get rid of them. Indeed, could they but reconcile the belief of a Deity, with the enjoyment of their luſts, the thoughts of him would be eaſie enough to them; and this temptation to Atheiſm in a great meaſure ceaſe. Could they ſerve the true God, as the Heathens did the falſe ones, with riot and uncleaneſs, none would be greater Votaries than they: But ſince the ſenſe of him ſtrikes ſuch a damp upon their Pleaſures, and puts ſuch a curb and reſtraint upon their Vices, they cannot away with the thoughts of him, and

therefore

therefore labour to rid their minds of the belief, that they may be rid of the fear of ſuch a Being. But, is this a wiſe or ſafe courſe? No, extremely fooliſh and dangerous: for, tho' it be weakneſs to fear where no fear is, yet not to fear where there is a juſt cauſe and a proper Object for it, is the height of Folly: And, to ſhut our Eyes againſt a certain Danger, for fear of being frightned by it, is no better than madneſs. Indeed, could we put out the Sun by winking, or avoid the danger of Divine Vengeance, by ſhaking off the dread of it, there might be ſome ſhew of Reaſon for our Unbelief; but, ſince the truth of things depends not upon our belief or disbelief of them; and the very Notion of a Deity implies a neceſſity of Exiſtence, it muſt be monſtrouſly ſenſeleſs and unreaſonable, to caſt off the awe and dread of him.

Again, To regulate our Faith by intereſt and affection, is to walk by a falſe and crooked Rule: For, theſe being frequently corrupted, clap a wrong Biaſs upon the Mind, which too often turns it from the Truth, and turns it unto Fables: And conſequently, to ſteer our courſe by theſe meaſures, is to follow a falſe

falſe Guide, which muſt lead us out of our way. Indeed, would men rightly underſtand and follow their true Intereſt, it would then lead them aright into the paths of Religion, there being no comfort or ſecurity at all to be had without it: But, when they weakly miſtake their Intereſt, and vainly wiſh there were no Superior Being to obſtruct it, they do but court miſery, and fondly chuſe their own deſtruction.

In ſhort, the vaſt riſque that theſe men run, plainly ſhews it to be extremely unſafe and dangerous: For, if the Atheiſt find at laſt that there is a God, whom he hath all his life-time deny'd and deſpis'd, what unſpeakable Horror muſt ſeize his guilty Soul, which muſt groan for ever under the wrath of ſuch an Almighty Being, and be eternally miſerable without eaſe or remedy? The Good-man runs no riſque at all, for the ſenſe of ſuch a Being hath made him more healthful and eaſie to himſelf, more uſeful and ſerviceable to others, and more honoured and reſpected of all men for both: And if there be no God at laſt, he can find no inconvenience in this belief; but if there be one,

one, he hath infinitely the better on't; being ſure to be Eternally Happy in his favour and preſence.

So that if this were but a doubtful Caſe, common prudence teaches men to chuſe the ſafeſt ſide; to which therefore 'twill be our Wiſdom to incline. I am,

SIR,

October 16. 1698. Your hearty Friend,

A. B.

LETTER II.

SIR,

I Find you ſenſible, in your laſt, of the great evil and danger of that Artifice which hath drawn ſo many into Atheiſm, (*viz.*) The caſting off the awe and ſenſe of a Deity, that they may go on the more ſecurely in their Sins. I proceed in this to another Device made uſe of to the ſame purpoſe,

(and

(and that is) ſome Mens endeavouring to ſolve the *Phænomena* of the Univerſe, and to give an account of the Exiſtence of the World without a Supream Being.

'Tis well known, that one of the Principal Arguments and Demonſtrations of a Deity, is taken from the Works both of Creation and Providence; [*The Inviſible things of God from the Creation of the World, being clearly ſeen, even his Eternal Power and Godhead.*] And 'tis evident, (as the ſame Apoſtle told the Men of *Lyſtra*) [*That God hath not left himſelf without witneſs, in that he doth good, and giveth rain from Heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs.*] Indeed, the admirable frame and order of the World, together with the wonderful Proviſion made for all the Creatures in it, plainly beſpeak an Almighty Agent, to be both the Contriver and Preſerver of it: Yea, there are thoſe viſible marks of an Infinite Power, Wiſdom and Goodneſs, ſtampt upon every Creature, that manifeſtly ſhew the Finger of a God; and direct our Minds to the Knowledge and Contemplation of him.

Now

Now to evade this clear and palpable Proof of his Being, the Atheiſt racks his Brain to find out a way of accounting for theſe things, without a firſt Cauſe or Orderer of them. And of theſe there are two ſorts, *viz.*

The firſt, Of thoſe that aſſert the Eternity of the World.

The other, Of ſuch as make it the Product of Chance and Fortune. The Former, are the followers of *Ariſtotle*, and the Latter of *Epicurus*. Both which ſhew their great unwillingneſs to believe a Deity; and how deſirous they are *to live without God in the World*. But let us Examine the Account they give us of theſe Matters. To which end, let us begin with the firſt ſort.

1*ſt*. Who, to ſet aſide a Firſt Cauſe, affirm the World to have had no beginning, but to have been from Eternity, as it now is; there having been an Eternal Succeſſion of Men and all other Creatures, as we now find it.

Now, what proof is offer'd for this bold Affirmation? Why, none at all, 'tis a precarious Aſſertion, taken up from the ſingle Opinion of *Ariſtotle*, without any offer of Proof, or colour of Reaſon; and only ſhews that ſome Men

Men have a mind to have it ſo; and would fain perſuade themſelves and others to it, if they can. And yet this Opinion, as deliver'd by *Ariſtotle*, ſerves not the Atheiſt's turn neither: For, tho' he affirmed the World to have no Beginning, yet he ſaid not 'twas of its ſelf; but that it proceeded from God, by the way of a Natural and neceſſary Effect, as light does from the Sun. Where there is a plain Confeſſion of a God, from whom the World and all things in it ſprang by a Natural and Eternal Emanation. So that he did not, with the Modern Atheiſts, ſet up the Notion of the Eternity of the World, to exclude a Firſt Cauſe, but thought it to be conſiſtent with it.

But is there any Proof that the World had a Beginning, and that there is a Firſt Cauſe and Maker of it? Yes, as great as the Nature of the thing is capable of; which being a matter of Fact of an ancient Date, can only be prov'd by Teſtimony, and the fair appearances of Reaſon: And if both theſe concur in the matter before us, 'tis as much as the thing will bear; and

and conſequently, as much as any wiſe man will require.

1*ſt*. And Firſt, that the World was made and had a Beginning, we have the Teſtimony of all Mankind from the firſt making of it; there being an Univerſal Tradition hereof, deliver'd down thro' every Age ſince its Beginning. The *Egyptians*, and *Phœnicians* of old; the *Grecians*, *Aſſyrians*, *Perſians*, and *Romans*, of latter Date, all had, and handed down this Tradition. Yea, the *Indians* and all other the moſt rude and barbarous Nations, that had little or no Commerce with other Nations, concurr'd in this Belief; all of them worſhiping a God, whom they own'd to be the Maker and Governour of the World. And tho' ſome difference hath been found about the Computation of Time, and the Age of the World, yet all agree in this, that it was made. Yea, we find *Ariſtotle* himſelf, who was the firſt Aſſerter of the Eternity of the World, (in his Book *De Mundo*, Chap. *6th*) freely confeſſing, that 'twas a general Tradition among all Men, that all things are of God, and were made by him.

2*dly*. Again

2*dly*. Again, *Secondly*, we find this Universal Tradition confirmed by the written Histories of all Times and Places ever since. If we allow *Moses* the Credit of the first and ancientest Historian (which cannot be in Reason denied him) we have a full and consistent Relation of the Beginning of the World and all things in it, which hath been receiv'd, and recorded from him in all succeeding Ages; and is most agreeable with the Account which all other Ancient Writers, whether Poets or Philosophers, give of this matter, being in all probability derived from him: Insomuch, that we find *Aristotle* himself (in his Book *De Cælo, lib.* 1. *cap.* 10.) once more acknowledging, that all the Philosophers that were before him, did hold that the World was made.

3*dly*. Moreover, *Thirdly*, we can trace up the Original of all Arts and Sciences, in the several Times and Places, when, and where they were first Invented: Which, if the World were Eternal, would have been found out long before, and been known far beyond all Memory: Unless we can suppose, that all Men in the Ages before

fore we have any Account, paſſed an Eternity in a deep Sleep; and were all ſo dull, as either to do nothing Memorable, or to be unable or unwilling to Record it. And therefore *Lucretius* wiſely asks the Queſtion, If the World had no Beginning, how comes it to paſs, that the moſt Ancient Poets mention nothing higher than the *Theban* War, and the Deſtruction of *Troy*?

And indeed, if the World had no beginning, it is ſtrange that no account ſhould be given of any thing in that Eternity of Duration, before the World is ſaid to begin: And that all things that are known, ſhould be found out and Recorded ſince that time.

4. Beſides *Fourthly*, We ſee the ſundry parts of which the World conſiſts, to be ſubject to decay and Corruption; and had they been ſo from all Eternity, they muſt in all probability have utterly periſh'd and come to nothing long ſince. The Frame of the World, is compos'd of ſuch frail Corruptible Materials, that, in an infinite ſpace, would neceſſarily diſſolve, and fall aſunder, without a Superiour Power to

uphold and keep the parts together. This we may ſee excellently urg'd by *Lucretius* (Lib. 5.) where he tells us, "That the World muſt neceſſarily be "acknowledg'd to have had a begin- "ning, otherwiſe, thoſe things which "are in their own Nature corruptible, "could never, from all Eternity, have "held out againſt all the forcible and vi- "olent Aſſaults and Accidents, which "in an infinite duration muſt have "happen'd to them. And therefore we find, that *Ariſtotle* having affirm'd the World to have had no beginning, was thereby driven in his own defence, to affirm, it can have no end; for what- ſoever hath an end, muſt have a be- ginning: And if the Frame of the World be Subject to Diſſolution, it could not poſſibly have been from E- ternity. In ſhort, we plainly ſee, that all things are ſome way or other pro- duc'd; every man is of another; and every other thing hath ſome Cauſe of his Being, which muſt neceſſarily lead up to a firſt Cauſe, which is of its ſelf, and made and preſerves all o- ther: And if the World had no begin- ning, we may ſafely conclude, it muſt long ſince have had an end. So that

this

this Firſt *Hypotheſis* of the Eternity of the World, taken up without any proof, upon the ſingle Authority of *Ariſtotle*, againſt the Univerſal Belief and Tradition of Mankind, is, both unreaſonable and unaccountable.

2. Let us proceed then, *Secondly*, to that of *Epicurus*, and ſee whether that be any better. And here, to exclude a Deity or firſt Cauſe, we find him affirming, that the World was made by Chance, and all things in it came together of themſelves, by ſome lucky Hits and Accidents: An account whereof is briefly this, (*viz.*) "They "tell us, that the Matter of which the "World was fram'd, was from Eter-"nity; and likewiſe, an Infinite emp-"ty ſpace, for the innumerable ſmall "Particles (call'd Atomes) to move "and play in: And that theſe being "in continual motion, did after infi-"nite Tryals and Rencounters, with-"out the help or direction of a Supreme "Being, by lucky Hits and Chances, "ſettle at laſt in that goodly Frame "and Order of things, which we now "ſee, and find the World to be in.

A goodly account indeed! Which ſerves only to ſhew, that ſome men

are willing to believe any thing rather than a God. For, who ever heard of a Houſe that was made without Hands? Or a Book compos'd by an accidental jumbling and meeting together of Letters and Syllables of their own accord? And yet, This is far more eaſie to be imagin'd, than for ſo Stately and Beautiful a Structure as this of the World, to be rais'd without an Artificer: Or the great Volume of the Univerſe, to be compil'd without an Author. But, what Foundation hath this vain and incredible *Hypotheſis*? Why, none but the bold confidence of *Epecurus* and his Followers, grounded upon a deſire of letting looſe the Reins to his Appetite, and enjoying ſenſual Pleaſures without controul. Indeed, there can be no poſſible evidence of the World's being thus made by chance: For, theſe Atomes of which he ſpeaks are altogether inviſible; and, for ought we know, move only in the empty ſpace of an *Epicurean* Brain. Yea, there is all imaginable Evidence to the contrary: For, there are thoſe apparent Marks of

Infinite

Infinite Power and Wiſdom in the Frame of the World, that render it altogether impoſſible to be the effect of Chance: for, ſince none could ever ſpeak of a Structure, where all the parts of it came together of themſelves; and we never read of any thing Great and Noble, that was ever effected or came to paſs that way; how ſenſeleſs is it to conceive, that this glorious and regular Fabrick of the World, which affords as many Wonders as Parts, ſhould be the work of any other than a Divine Hand.

So that the Folly of this Device, of giving an account of the Being and continuance of the World, without a Deity, is very apparent; for it contradicts the Reaſon and Senſe of Mankind in all Ages; and oppoſes a Truth, that hath ſwim'd down the Current of time without interruption. Neither is the Evil and Danger leſs viſible, than the Folly of it: For, this is the higheſt Affront and Indignity that can be offer'd to our Maker, to rob him of the Honour of his Works, and to deny him the Glory that ſhould accrue from them. There is certainly

a Tribute of Honour and acknowledgment due to the Soveraign Lord and Maker of the Univerſe; which is to be paid by all his Creatures, but eſpecially by Man, who is made the viſible Lord and Vice-Roy of this lower World: Now, to call in queſtion his making or right of governing the World, is to deny him this Homage; and conſequently to prove Rebellious to our Supreme Lord and Maſter; which muſt needs be a matter of extreme and inconceivable danger.

Again, *2dly.* 'Tis a high piece of Ingratitude to diſown our Maker and chiefeſt Benefactour, from whom we receive Life and Breath and all things; and to whom we owe therefore our loudeſt Praiſes and Thankſgivings: And when all other Creatures in, their way, ſhew forth the Glory of God, what Unworthineſs is it in Man, who was chiefly deſign'd for that end, to with-hold it from him: This is, not only negligently to obſerve the Works of the Lord, but utterly to diſclaim and forget the Operations of his Hand: Which muſt needs ſink him who was made ſomewhat higher

higher than the Angels, into a Condition lower and worſe than the Beaſt that periſheth.

3*dly*. Yea (*Thirdly*) This is not only a high piece of injuſtice and ingratitude to our Maker, but a great injury to Mankind; who are hereby depriv'd of that Aſſiſtance and Affiance, they might have in a Supreme Being; and conſequently of that comfort and benefit they might receive from him. We dayly ſee what impotent and feeble Creatures, even the beſt of Men are; liable to a thouſand miſeries and misfortunes, which they can neither prevent nor remove: Now the only comfort or relief we can have againſt Theſe; is, in the Apprehenſions of a God, who is of infinite Power and Goodneſs; and conſequently, both able and willing to help us: There we may ſafely repoſe our Truſt and Confidence, with well-grounded hopes of a ſupply of all our wants, and a happy iſſue out of all our afflictions: Now, by calling in Queſtion the Truth of ſuch a Being, who is the Author and diſpoſer of ſuch Events, Men bereave themſelves of all theſe comfortable expectations, and make them-

ſelves miſerable by their own Infidelity. So that this Device of the Atheiſt, is as imprudent as 'tis unreaſonable; for it deprives him of all that comfort, which he might have in this Life; and excludes him from all that happineſs, to which he was deſign'd in the next.

Theſe are obvious Truths, on which I ſhall not need to enlarge; and ſhall therefore leave them to your farther Meditation. I am,

SIR,

Your true Friend,

A. B

LETTER III.

SIR,

IN your laſt I find you readily own the works of Creation and Providence to be palpable Demonſtrations of a Deity, and wonder at the Atheiſts blindneſs

neſs or boldneſs in ſo eaſily overlooking or gainſaying them.

I proceed in this to another Device to the ſame purpoſe, and that is the ſilencing the Voice of Conſcience, and ſtifling the frequent Notices and Alarms it gives of a Supreme Being: Among the other witneſſes that God hath left us of himſelf, that of Conſcience is none of the leaſt, which for the clear and uncontrolable Evidence of its Teſtimony, hath been reckon'd more than a thouſand witneſſes. That we might not be left without ſufficient Light in a matter of ſo great moment, God Almighty hath not only Engraven his own Image and Superſcription upon the Works of his Hand, that by the frequent viewing thereof, we might be ſtill minded of him; but hath likewiſe ſet up a conſtant Monitor in every Man's Breaſt, that by hearkening to it we might never forget him: This is that which is ſtil'd the Light of Nature, and by ſome the Light within them, which, if rightly underſtood, muſt be meant of this Directive Light of their own Mind or Conſcience: *Solo-*

ſtiles *it, the Candle of the Lord*, to light

light us in the way, that we ſhould go. The Prophet *Iſaias* calls it, *a voice behind or within us, ſaying, this is the way walk in it, when we are turning either to the right hand or to the left.* St. *Paul* told the Gentiles, that tho' they had no *written Law, yet they were a Law to themſelves, their Conſcience bearing witneſs, and their thoughts accuſing or excuſing one another,* Rom. 2. And withal adds, that as God hath not *left himſelf without witneſs,* having given ſufficient notice of his Being; ſo he had left them, *without excuſe,* if they did not Worſhip and Glorifie him as they ought.

But how does Conſcience give this notice and conviction of a Deity? Why, ſundry ways; as,

Firſt, By its ſecret motions and ſuggeſtions, which oft-times awakens our Mind, and powerfully ſtirs us up to our duty to him: If we obſerve it, we ſhall find and feel ſomething within us moving, and loudly calling upon us to that which is good; and ſecretly whiſpering and diſſuading us againſt that which is evil: Now theſe are the private Notices of Conſcience, which God hath ſet up as a Remembrancer

and

and witneſs of him within our Breaſts. Again,

2*dly*. We feel an inward delight and complacence in well-doing, and are fill'd with joy and peace in believing: Now, whence ſhould this proceed, but from the ſecret notice of Conſcience, which minds us of a God, and that what we have done is acceptable and well-pleaſing to him? The good Man (ſaith *Solomon*) *is ſatisfied from himſelf*, that is from his own Conſcience, which he ſtiles a continual Feaſt, that entertains him with the ſweeteſt peace and tranquility of mind, and fills him with purer joys, than any earthly comforts can afford him, even with joy unſpeakable and full of Glory, ariſing from a Belief that God is, and that he is a Rewarder of all thoſe that diligently ſeek him. Moreover,

3*dly*. The Sinner feels ſecret Stings and Laſhes within, when he hath done amiſs, and is inwardly troubled and perplex'd after the Commiſſion of any Enormity; his Debaucheries grate upon his mind, and follow him with frequent fears and terrors; there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled Sea that cannot reſt.

Now,

Now, this can proceed from nothing but the inward whiſpers and information of Conſcience, which frequently takes the Sinner aſide, and rates him ſoundly by himſelf, letting him know how he hath offended his Maker, and thereby juſtly incurr'd the diſmal effects of his diſpleaſure; hence the Sinner feels many ſharp girds and twitches within, even for Sins known to none but God and himſelf: Which knowledge proceeds from this ſecret Monitor, who is both an Accuſer, Witneſs, and Judge, all which Offices it commonly performs with great fidelity and diligence; inſomuch that if there be no God to be feared by us, we might envy the happineſs of brute Beaſts, who have none of theſe frights, nor are troubled with any of theſe ſtinging Reflections: Yea Mankind, without a Deity, would be not only the moſt miſerable, but the moſt ridiculous of all Creatures, to be thus terrified at nothing, and ſcar'd with ſuch an imaginary Bugbear of his own making: All other Beings have ſome real Object of their fears; and ſurely Man muſt be the ſillieſt of all Creatures, to be thus haunted with the dread of

inviſible

inviſible Powers and a Judgment to come, if no ſuch things were to be fear'd or expected: his Underſtanding and Reaſon would ſerve him to good purpoſe, to ſuggeſt ſuch needleſs terrors, as to fright him with a Dream, and make him tremble at his own Shadow. So that this remorſe and trouble of mind, with which the greateſt Sinners are purſued, is a plain Argument of a Deity, without which no tolerable account could be given of theſe things.

But if Conſcience be ſo clear a proof and witneſs of a Deity, how comes it to paſs, that ſo many deny and forget God, when they have ſuch a faithful and conſtant Monitor within to keep him in remembrance? why the Miſery as well as Myſtery of it is, that too many ſilence the Voice of Conſcience, and will not ſuffer it to ſpeak, or if (as it ſometimes happens) they cannot ſtop its mouth, like the deaf Adder they ſtop their ear, *and refuſe to hear the Voice of the Charmer, tho he charm never ſo wiſely*; yea, tho they are many times hard put to it to ſtill the clamour and importunity of their own Minds, yet they uſe all their Arts to keep

keep it quiet, and to ſtifle thoſe Convictions.

But what courſe do they take to effect it? Why,

Sometimes by lulling it a-ſleep in a carnal ſecurity; or elſe, if that will not do, by hardening and ſearing it as with a hot Iron.

Firſt, I ſay, ſome men to keep their Conſcience quiet, endeavour to lull it a-ſleep in a carnal and fatal ſecurity; and this they do by an inordinate purſuit of their ſenſual Luſts and Pleaſures; if the ſerious thoughts of a God ſometimes preſs too much upon them, they ſeek either to drown them in their intemperate Cups, or to ſtifle them by the ſoftneſs of Lewdneſs and Dalliance: If they find their minds begin to recover out of this Lethargy, and theſe ſerious thoughts return, they have recourſe to idle and looſe Company to relieve themſelves from the trouble of them, where they keep their Heads ſo hot with their frequent exceſſes, that they are ſeldom or never cool enough to conſider things as they ought, and thus by bringing a continual doozineſs upon their Senſes, they paſs away their time as in a Dream or Slumber, and

by

by degrees fall into an utter forgetfulneſs of God and their Duty. But if they cannot preſently thus lull their Conſcience a-ſleep, they endeavour,

2*dly*. To harden it againſt Conviction, and to ſear it as with an hot Iron; and this they do by vicious habits contracted by a long continued cuſtom in Sin, whereby the Mind is in a manner ſtupified, and made ſenſeleſs of all Evil and Danger: This is ſuch a degree of wickedneſs to which none can arrive preſently, for *Nemo repente fuit Turpiſſimus*. Time is requir'd to wear off the impreſſions of Good and Evil; for Conſcience recoils at firſt, and hath that natural tenderneſs, as to feel the ſmart, and fear the evil of ſuch courſes; till by frequent reſiſting its Calls, they have overcome this Reluctance, and made it become callous and paſt feeling; and thus by a long practice and continuance in Sin, they gradually loſe the ſenſe and awe of a Deity, and ſettle in Atheiſm and Infidelity.

Now for Men to be at ſo great pains to ſtupifie their Conſcience, and hinder it from doing its office, muſt be a very unwiſe and unſafe courſe; for this is to ſilence the Voice of God within us, and

and to turn the deaf Ear to our Maker; yea 'tis to deſpiſe the remembrance, and hate the knowledge of him, and to ſay with them in *Job*, *depart from us, we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

And yet after all their pains, this will prove in the end but a fruitleſs attempt, for Conſcience will one time or other ſpeak, and loud enough to be heard too, and tho it may be lull'd aſleep a while, it will e're long awake, and ring a Peal of Vengeance in the Ears of all ſuch bold and daring Sinners, as ſeek now to ſtupifie and ſilence it.

Indeed, that preſent ſenſeleſſneſs and ſtupidity, which they bring upon their mind, ſerves but to render their condition the more deſperate and remedileſs; for as in bodily diſtempers, when the ſenſe of pain is loſt, the Patient is in greateſt danger, and the diſeaſe proves moſt mortal, and incurable; even ſo in ſpiritual Maladies, when the mind is paſt feeling, the Caſe is commonly paſt recovery; and evermore the leſs ſenſe of pain, the greater danger: which ſhould teach us to *hearken to the voice of God* and Conſcience,

Conſcience *whilſt it's call'd to day, leſt the Heart be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of Sin*; before the Mind grow brawny and inſenſible, and fall into ſuch a deep ſleep, as nothing but Eternal Miſery can awake it.

In a word, the peace and tranquility that the Mind feels from the Apprehenſions of a God, ſhews it to be the intereſt of Mankind to believe and pleaſe him, which alone can give us this hearts-eaſe: And likewiſe the terrors and frightful Apprehenſions, that flow from a diſſolute life, are ſufficient to make all Men abhor and abandon the Cauſe of Atheiſm. I am,

SIR,

Your Faithful Friend,

A. B.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

I Find you ſenſible of the hard ſhifts the Atheiſt is put to, to ſilence the Voice of Conſcience, and ſtifle the Alarms and Convictions of his own mind, together with the Folly and Danger of that Stratagem. I proceed therefore to another, and that is to aſcribe the Notion of a Deity to a too great eaſineſs of Belief, or a fond Credulity: This we find to be a frequent Plea and Objection in this caſe. One great Argument for the proof of a God, is taken from the Univerſal Conſent and Agreement of Mankind in this Belief, there being nothing ſo generally own'd and receiv'd, in all times and places, as this Truth; and that not only among the Wiſe and Knowing, but even among the rudeſt and moſt ignorant part of the World: *Nulla gens tam barbara*, &c. ſaith the *Roman* Orator

tor, There is no Nation ſo barbarous as not to Believe and Worſhip a God.

Now whence ſhould this Univerſal Conſent of Mankind in this Belief proceed, but from the Voice of Nature, which ſpeaks loud enough to be heard, the ſound whereof is gone through the Earth, and the Words to the end of the World? Yea, this can be no other than an Impreſſion ſtamp'd on the Mind, by a Divine Hand, engraven by the Finger of God himſelf, and interwoven into the very Frame of our Being.

But how doth the Atheiſt evade this univerſally receiv'd Truth? Why, by charging Mankind with too great a Credulity in this matter; as if all Men beſide himſelf, were too haſty and eaſie of belief, and took up this perſuaſion upon very ſlender and inſufficient grounds; whereas he ſcorns to be thus eaſily led by vain talk, and to yield up his underſtanding to uncertain rumour: Hence the great Atheiſt of our Age founds all Religion upon the belief of tales publickly told, as if the Being and belief of a Deity, were built only upon a report handed down from one

to another, and had no better foundation than common Fame.

Now is not this a ſtrange piece of raſhneſs and preſumption, for any to condemn all before or beſide himſelf, for a company of credulous Fools and Children, that can believe any thing, and ſwallow the greateſt difficulties, without the leaſt reaſon or examination. But let us enquire a little farther into this matter.

Who was it that firſt rais'd this Report of a Deity? Or by whom was this Tradition began? This is matter well worth the enquiry, who made this firſt Diſcovery, or rais'd this Spirit, which all the Wiſdom of the world could never conjure down ſince. Certainly he muſt have been ſome wiſe or cunning Body, that could invent and propagate ſo plauſible a ſtory, as to paſs the Tryal of all Ages, and that none could ever find out or detect the falſhood of it, ſure the Fame of ſuch a perſon would have been Recorded in the Annals of Time, and Poſterity could never have been ſo unjuſt to his Memory, as to let him ſink away in ſilence and oblivion: And yet the Atheiſt here is wholly at a loſs in theſe things, and will neither pretend

to

to tell us the time when, the place where, or the perſon by whom this report firſt began: Only (as one hath obſerv'd) he thinks it probable that ſome body long ago (he knows not when) beyond the Memory of all Ages, did ſtart ſuch a notion in the World, and that it hath paſt for currant ever ſince; but if this Tradition be older than all Hiſtory, why may it not have been from the beginning? And then it will be far more probable, to be a notion which was bred in the mind of Man, and born with him, than a Tradition tranſmitted from hand to hand through all Generations, eſpecially being found in thoſe barbarous Nations, that have ſcarce a Tradition of any thing elſe. But how come theſe Men thus to oppoſe the general Senſe of Mankind, and to call in queſtion ſo univerſally own'd and receiv'd a Truth? Why! this proceeds,

Partly from their great unwillingneſs to believe it, which makes them take hold of any, even the meaneſt ſhifts, to countenance their unbelief. And

Partly from an Affectation of Singularity, whereby they would be thought

wiſer and more knowing, than any that went before them, that they ſee farther into matters than other Men, and that their Underſtandings are by head and ſhoulders taller than their Brethren; they know well enough, that ſhould they go on with the common herd, and ſay and do as others that have gone before them, they ſhould be thought to be no wiſer than they; and therefore that they may ſet up for Wits, and be accounted Men of a deeper reach and inſight into things, than others, they ſtrike out of the common road, and go a new untrodden way by themſelves; this makes them look upon the belief of a Deity, (tho' confirm'd by the general conſent of Mankind) to be only the effect of weakneſs and want of judgment, that they who entertain it, are merely carried away with the Stream, and like eaſie credulous perſons, take up things upon truſt, from the uncertain Hear-ſay and Report of others no wiſer than themſelves: Whereas they, like Men of judgment, believe and act by another Rule; and where their own Reaſon cannot convince them of a truth, there no Authority of others ſhall ſway them

them to the belief of it. And thus by a vain conceit and affectation of Singularity, they leave the track in which all others have gone before them, which unawares bewilders and leads them into Atheiſm.

But is it a vain Credulity, to embrace a Truth confirm'd by the Conſent and Approbation of all Mankind? or is it any piece of Wiſdom, to ſet up a ſingle opinion againſt the Wiſdom of the whole World? No, far from it; the wiſeſt of Men hath told us, that he that is wiſe in his own conceit is a fool; and certainly he muſt be extremely ſo, that thinks himſelf wiſer than all Men beſide him: Indeed, to keep the mind from being enſlav'd to precarious and Vulgar Notions, or receiving things upon truſt without examination, is to aſſert the freedom of the Underſtanding, which very well becomes a wiſe Man to do; but to reject an Opinion merely becauſe it hath been univerſally receiv'd, is a rudeneſs offer'd to the Reaſon of Mankind; for if many heads may be ſuppos'd to be wiſer than one, that wherein all Heads concenter and agree, ought in Reaſon to be preferr'd before any ſingle opinion; and there-

fore to quarrel with a Truth, for no other reaſon, but becauſe it hath been own'd and embrac'd by all, is an unpardonable piece of pride and ſingularity; for this makes Men overvalue themſelves, and ſet too low a price upon the judgment of their betters, which is a high piece of arrogance and folly: Yea by this means they deprive themſelves of the benefit and aſſiſtance of other Mens Underſtandings, and leaning wholly upon their own, are thereby often betray'd into great errors and miſcarriages.

'Tis true, we are forbid to *follow a multitude in doing Evil*, but not in receiving Truth, which is the greateſt good we can do to our ſelves or others: And tho' we are bid *to try all things*, yet we are requir'd *to hold faſt that which is good*, and not to ſtart aſide from the belief of that which hath paſt the tryal and approbation of all Times and Ages.

There is (as one hath well obſerv'd) a Reverence due to the Judgment of Mankind, and that which hath been receiv'd by all or moſt Men, hath been ever thought moſt worthy of acceptation:

ceptation: yea the laws of modeſty require us to think others better than our ſelves, and to ſuſpect our own Judgment, when it croſſes theirs; for tho' the generality of Men may be ſometimes miſtaken, which ſhould therefore put us upon the ſtricter ſearch and enquiry into Truth, yet to be over poſitive and confident againſt the univerſal Senſe and Belief of Mankind, is to reſiſt the cleareſt evidence we can have, and to run counter to the greateſt probabilities.

But what if theſe great Maſters of Wit ſhould all this while be found the moſt Credulous and eaſie of belief of all Men? what then will become of all theſe vain Boaſts and Pretenſions to Reaſon? And yet this is as clear as the Sun at Noon-day; for they believe many things without the leaſt colour and ſhadow of reaſon; and deny others that have all poſſible evidence of truth; both which are apparent inſtances of a groſs and abſurd Credulity.

They believe that there is no God, and conſequently that 'tis impoſſible there ſhould be one, a thing which no Art of Man ever could or pretended to demonſtrate.

Again,

Again, they believe either that the World was never made, or if it were, that 'twas made by chance, and that all things in it came into that excellent order they now are, by mere fortune: which shews that they can believe at random, and take up the most absurd *Hypotheſis* at a venture. Again,

They believe that tho' matter be in it ſelf a dull and ſenſeleſs thing, utterly incapable of Reaſon and Underſtanding, yet there can be no ſpiritual or immaterial Being to influence or actuate it. In a Word,

The Atheiſt can believe againſt all the Senſe and Reaſon of all Mankind, and think all the World beſide himſelf to conſiſt only of Fools and Knaves; a bold *Brittain!* And yet thoſe and many other are the goodly Articles of the Atheiſt's *Creed*, which he that can ſwallow, muſt be a man of ſtrong Faith or vaſt Credulity, and muſt believe with his Will, not with his Underſtanding. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER V.

SIR,

ANother Device of the Atheiſt is to reſolve the Belief of a God into the Principles and Prejudices of Education: This Device is near a-kin to and grounded upon the former, and pretends to give ſome account of the ſpring and riſe of this Credulity; which he takes to be from the firſt impreſſions of Education; this being the firſt Notion inſtill'd by Parents into their Children, as ſoon as they come to underſtand any thing, and is improv'd by thoſe who have the Education and Management of them ever after.

And here they obſerve, what deep impreſſions are made upon the Mind, by the firſt things we hear or learn; how long they are wont to continue with us, and how ready Men are to communicate them to one another, and more eſpecially to derive them to their

their offspring: From whence they think such a general belief of a Deity may easily be suppos'd in time to obtain, and be transmitted down from hand to hand through all Generations.

Now here the Question may be ask'd again, Who was the first person that invented and convey'd down this Notion? what was his name or his Son's name, that we may know him? how came he to entertain it himself? who taught it him? and how came he so readily to believe and propagate it to Posterity? Why, of all this the Atheist can give no manner of account, unless he will flye to the Holy Scripture, and say, that *Adam* the first Man had it from God, and taught it to his Children, and so convey'd it down to all Generations; but this would be to yield up the Cause, and to acknowledge a first Being and Maker of all things, which yet he is very unwilling to grant.

Besides, that this is a precarious and groundless Hypothesis, may plainly appear from this, that Men in all Ages have been known to be of different tempers, and to have had various and different ways and methods of Educati-

on,

on, by which means they have receiv'd different Impreſſions, and entertain'd various Sentiments of things: And yet we find all Men, in all times, and of all tempers (tho' differing never ſo much in other things) to agree and concenter in this belief of a God, which ſhews it to have another and higher Principle than that of Education.

Again, if we conſult the frame and make of our Being, we ſhall find this Notion of a Deity ſtampt upon our very Natures, and that in ſuch plain and legible Characters, as may eaſily ſhew whoſe workmanſhip we are, and out of what hands we came; and this too in perſons of no Education, and before any thing was inſtill'd into them by it, which farther proves it to proceed from a higher Cauſe: To all which if we add moreover,

That ſtrong and powerful Inclination that is found in all Men to worſhip a God, we ſhall find this to go before, and not to be planted in them by Education: If we ſurvey the World, we may obſerve a natural proneneſs and propenſity to Religion, even in the moſt barbarous and uncultivated parts of it; all of them every where conſpiring

ring together to worſhip ſomething or other as a God: Now this cannot poſſibly be owing only to Education, which may indeed direct, but cannot infuſe theſe Inclinations; he that created the Soul, could alone put that byaſs into it, that draws ſo ſtrong to the adoration of him; for the beſt nurture can no more put ſuch new Inclinations, than it can put a new Nature into us: So that this univerſal Inclination to religious Worſhip muſt proceed from ſomething within, that is born with us, and is connatural to our Being; and can no more flow from any thing imprinted on our Minds from without, than the natural Paſſions of Hope and Fear are owing to the impreſſions of outward Objects.

But here the Atheiſt tells us, That this Argument taken from an univerſal Inclination to worſhip a Deity, will hold as ſtrong for Polytheiſm and Idolatry, as for a Unity of the Godhead; there being as great, if not a greater part of the World led by it to worſhip many falſe Gods than one true one.

Now to this, which is all the Atheiſt hath to ſay in this caſe, ſundry anſwers may be given. As,

Firſt,

First, The Assertion on which the Objection is grounded is a great mistake, for the greatest and wisest part of Mankind have ever paid their Adorations to one Supreme Being: As for the Jewish Nation, the whole body of them serv'd one only God, known by the name *Jehovah*, as is evident from Prophane as well as Sacred History; and for the other Nations, that deriv'd their Pedigree and Tradition from them, they had always one above the rest whom they worshipp'd with the highest acts of Adoration: Indeed some of the grosser Heathens multiplied their Gods, according to the multitude and variety of Blessings they suppos'd to receive from them; but these were derided by the Philosophers and more knowing Men, and the practice of the Multitude without the opinion and approbation of the Wise, signifies no more (as one hath told us in this case) than many Cyphers without a Figure.

Again, *Secondly*, The Polytheism of the Heathens is a good argument against Atheism, and their Idolatries are a plain proof of a Deity; for the rudest and most ignorant of all people have had those impressions of him upon their

their Mind, that they would rather have many Gods than be without any, and worſhip falſe Gods rather than none at all. Tho' they miſtook the true God, yet they all agreed in this, to worſhip ſome God or other; and this miſtake of theirs was not for want of ſufficient Evidence, but from the neglect or abuſe of their natural Reaſon, which led them from the true to falſe Gods, for *when they knew God (ſaith the Apoſtle) they worſhipped him not as God, and therefore their fooliſh hearts were darkened.* Moreover,

Laſtly, the many falſe Gods of the Heathen are a plain proof that there is one true one, for all Counterfeits ſuppoſe a Reality; there would be no falſe Coin, if there were none true; all Images are intended to repreſent ſomething that is real; neither would any Idols be ſet up, if there were not a true God to be worſhipped. In ſhort then, the Notion of a Deity muſt be founded in Nature, becauſe 'tis univerſal; and could not be acquired by Education, it being found in thoſe that never had any.

Beſide, nothing is laſting but what is natural; for the beſt things acquir'd by

by Inſtruction, have in many perſons been loſt and forgotten; and conſequently the Notion of a God would have fail'd in time, and the Worſhip of him ceas'd in many places, if it had no firmer Principle.

Seeing then that both theſe have continued through all Times and Ages, and are ſtill found in all Perſons and Places, yea, ſince the Atheiſt himſelf can ſcarce wear off the Impreſſion, or rid his Mind of the awe and ſenſe of a Deity, 'tis a poor ſhift to reſolve the Belief and Worſhip of him into the Principles and Prejudices of Education. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

I Shew'd in my laſt, That the Impreſſions of Education could not create, but muſt ſuppoſe a Deity, and that the knowledge and belief we have of him, is owing not ſo much to the outward Inſtructions we learn from others, as the inward Inclinations implanted in our own Mind; which are not taught, but born with us.

But if the Atheiſt cannot ſolve this great Phænomenon, or account for ſo general a Credulity this way, he hath another Device for that purpoſe; and that is to aſcribe the belief and worſhip of a God to *Fear*, or a ſuperſtitious dread of ſome inviſible Powers: And this he thinks cannot fail to do it. For the mind of Man (he tells us) and of ſome eſpecially, is mightily ſubject to the impreſſions of Fear, which are wont to ſink deep and continue long with them; and theſe again are apt to imprint

print the ſame dread on the Minds of others; which being diſcover'd and communicated, fill melancholy heads with infinite Fears and Jealouſies, which at length increaſe into a general awe and dread of ſuch a Being: ſo that Men are frighted into this belief by the frequent talk of a God, as Children are into the fear of Spirits by the Tales of Faries and Hobgoblins; and for this they quote that noted ſaying of the Poet,

Primus in Orbe Deos fecit Timor.

Fear firſt made Gods: Men being ſcar'd with ſome Jealouſies ariſing in their Minds about it, and terrified with the thoughts of what might happen.

Now here by this Aſſertion, the Atheiſt grants that the Minds of Men are generally ſeiz'd and poſſeſs'd with the Fears and Apprehenſions of a God, which is too well known and felt, to be call'd in queſtion: So that the main enquiry here is, whether Fear can create this Being; or whether ſuch a Being may not rather create theſe Fears? for ſince all other Paſſions pre-

ſuppoſe their Object, it is not to be conceiv'd how fear alone ſhould make it; if there be a God, that preſides over all things, and inſpects our ways, there is great reaſon to fear him; but if there be none, 'tis not to be imagin'd, how fear ſhould make ſuch a Being, or create ſuch an univerſal Belief in Mankind, that there is one. But how come ſo many to fear, where no fear is? what makes Men indow'd with Reaſon thus to be ſcar'd with their own ſhadow? or if ſome ſuch timerous creatures may be found, that are apt to be frighted with the terrors of their own fancy, How come all Mankind to be ſeiz'd with theſe panick fears? what ſhould create ſuch an univerſal trembling? or rivet this frightful Idea ſo deep into Mens Minds, that no Art or Endeavours can root it out?

Why, of this no account can be given without a Deity? which might well enough imprint this dread upon them, from a ſenſe of his infinite Power and Greatneſs.

Indeed, 'tis eaſie to conceive how Infinite Power and Juſtice may cauſe a dread; but 'tis not to be imagin'd, how

how dread ſhould be the cauſe of ſuch infinite perfections.

Again, it may be asked whether this Fear were before or after a Deity? if it be affirm'd to be before, as it muſt be, if Fear be the Cauſe of him, the Cauſe being ever before the Effect; it will follow, that ſomething may be before that which is Eternal; for ſince the Notion of a God implies a Being that exiſted from all Eternity, if Fear preceeded, and made this Being, it muſt have been before Eternity, and likewiſe give a Being to that, which never had or could have any beginning; both which are manifeſt contradictions.

If this Fear be ſaid to be after a Deity, then it could not be the Cauſe of him; foraſmuch as no Effect can be before, but muſt ſtill come after the Cauſe.

Whence then ſhould this fear proceed, by which Men are aw'd into this Belief? Why, it muſt proceed either from the ſuggeſtions and report of others, or from the inward ſuggeſtions of our own Mind.

If it came from the Relation and ſuggeſtions of others, it may be ask'd, who ſuggeſted it to them? And this enquiry

not ceaſe, till it be trac'd up to the firſt Author; in which the Atheiſt is at the ſame loſs as he was before, in running up the riſe of this Tradition.

If theſe Fears proceed from the inward ſuggeſtions of our own Mind, which is apt to fancy terrible things; it may be ask'd, who or what is it that brings to mind thoſe terrible things, and occaſions thoſe ſuggeſtions? Why this can be nothing but the ſenſe of ſome inviſible Powers, whom we have ſome way or other offended, which may cauſe ſome remorſe, and imprint ſome fears of his diſpleaſure: And let the Atheiſt give any other account of it, if he can.

Beſide, does not the Notion of a God imply a Being of infinite Mercy and Goodneſs, that is always ready to take care of, to ſupport and comfort his Creatures? And ſince the Object of Fear is always ſomething that is dreadful, how can Fear create the Belief of ſuch a Being, which is rather the Object of deſire than dread, and deſerves muchmore to be lov'd and wiſh'd for, than to be fear'd by us? So that fear alone, could never produce this Noble Effect; it might indeed beget an opinion of ſome ſtern, ſour, and

ſevere

ſevere Being, to be dreaded and ſhun'd by all that hear of him; but could never form a Notion of a Gracious, Merciful, and tender-hearted Lord, that is to be lov'd and deſir'd by all that know him: And therefore the Atheiſt to make his *Hypotheſis* the more plauſible, muſt join Love and Hope to Fear, to compleat this Glorious and Divine Atchievement.

Moreover, the Love of ſo benign, gracious, and amiable a Being, is ſufficient to overcome and expel fear, and nothing but the ſollicitation of ſenſual Luſts, could keep Mankind from admiring and doteing upon him: *There is no fear in love, but perfect love caſteth out fear; becauſe fear hath torment, he that feareth is not made perfect in love:* 1 John 4. 18.

Indeed the Love and Relation we bear to a bountiful Creator may well enough admit of a filial fear, conſiſting in an unwillingneſs to offend or diſpleaſe him; but no ſervile tormenting fear can conſiſt with the love that is due to ſo excellent a Being.

So that Fear is ſo far from making a God, that it tends rather (if it were poſſible) to unmake him, to turn him in-

to a Tyrant, and consequently to make him the object of our hatred and aversation; for he that hath such dreadful Apprehensions, cannot but wish there were no God, and from thence is but one remove from believing there is none. Yea,

This slavish fear tends to debase Mankind, and even to unmake him too, by degrading him to a lower Species, for *Degeneres animos Timor Arguit*. Such a fear sinks him beneath the dignity of his Nature, and makes him like the Beast that perisheth. Furthermore,

If there were no Being of such infinite Perfections to employ our Contemplation, the highest and noblest faculties of the Soul would be vain and useless; the Understanding would want an Object suitable to the Capacity of its Apprehension; the Will would have none commensurate to the largeness of its desires; the Affections would be destitute of an object worthy of its Love and Complacence; yea Fear it self would want both an Object and a Reason for those frequent terrors, that haunt and assault the Mind. Now there being no Power or Faculty in the meanest Creature, but what there is some Reason

and

and Uſe for, can it be conceiv'd that the Nobleſt Faculties of the Soul ſhould be planted in it in vain, and become all uſeleſs for want of a ſuitable Object to employ them.

In ſhort, if there were no God, Mankind would have nothing but temporal good things to deſire, and nothing but temporal Evils to fear; of both which the brute Beaſts have a quicker ſenſe than he: Yea his Reaſon, which is the Perfection and Glory of Humane Nature, would ſerve for no other end, but to be a Caterer to the Senſes, and provide for the gratification of a Carnal Appetite, which may be as well if not better gratified without than with it: So that without a Deity, as all Fear would be in vain, ſo all the ſuperior Faculties of the Soul, *viz.* Underſtanding and Reaſon, would be uſeleſs and inſignificant, as having no Object fit to exerciſe or entertain them. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

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LETTER VII.

SIR,

I Find you ſenſible in your laſt, that Fear could not be the Cauſe, but the Effect and Conſequent of a Belief of a Deity; and that no tolerable Reaſon can be given of the natural fear and dread of a God, if there were no ſuch Being: So that the Atheiſt being beaten out of this Subterfuge; I proceed in this to

Another Device, which he ſeeks to take ſhelter in, and that is, to aſcribe the Notion of a Deity, to State-policy, and to make the Belief of it a Contrivance of cunning Men, to keep the World in awe.

This is a new Device invented and propagated by ſome in this latter Age, who (as a great Man hath told us) imagine that ſome great Prince or Politician, like *Nebuchadnezzar*, ſet up this image of a Deity, and commanded *all People and Nations to fall down and Worſhip*

Worſhip it: And this being found an uſeful Engine of State, to keep Men in obedience to Government, hath been receiv'd by all Princes and States ever ſince. A goodly device indeed! and no doubt the iſſue of ſome wiſe and politick Head-piece; and to make it the more plauſible; they inſiſt at large, upon the Reaſon why it ſhould be cheriſh'd and countenanc'd by all Princes, *viz.* Becauſe of the good influence it hath upon the awing the People into Obedience. Again,

They tell us of the Peoples readineſs to comply with the humours and practices of Princes, who giving their Example and Encouragement herein, are eaſily followed and imitated by their Subjects: by which means this Notion, having the Stamp of Authority upon it, hath paſs'd current, and is generally embrac'd and kept up in the World: This is the ſumm of what they have to ſay in this Matter. Now here we may obſerve,

1. That this Device plainly ſuppoſes the Uſefulneſs of Religion, towards the Peace and Welfare of Mankind, and how greatly it conduces to the good Order and Government of the World; which

which ſhews it to be the intereſt of Mankind to wiſh it true; and this (one would think) ſhould rather incline Men to embrace, than evade ſo uſeful a Notion.

But by whom was this Engine of State devis'd? where or when did this great Prince or Politician live, that firſt found out this *Arcanum imperii*, this great Secret or Myſtery of Government? what proof is there alledg'd for any ſuch Contrivance? Why, none at all; no diſcovery hath been yet made of the Author of this Invention; it ſtill remains a Myſtery, as well as an Engine of State, a Cobweb ſpun out of ſome fanciful and ſubtle Brain; in a Word, tis a mere Conjecture, taken up without the leaſt appearance of Reaſon, or proof for any part of it.

Indeed, The thing appears in it ſelf unpracticable; for how is it poſſible for the wiſeſt Politician to rivet ſuch a Notion into the Minds of all Men, that ſhould never get out? where is the Perſon that ever did ſuch a feat? and if no ſuch one be any where to be found, we may ſafely conclude the deep

and

and lasting impressions of a Deity upon Mens Minds, to proceed not from the Art of Man, but from the Finger of God.

Beside, this is an improbable way of compassing the design; for the subtlest Politicians are wont to work upon the inclinations they find planted in Mens Nature; but do not hope to put new ones into them: They are wise enough to know, that Men are more easily led, than driven; and therefore chuse rather to make use of those Principles they find them already possess'd of, than go about to infuse new. Hence it comes to pass, that Princes reap the benefits of Peace and Order from Principles they never sowed in the hearts of their Subjects, but found planted there; and 'tis most certain, that the People are much more aw'd and kept to their duty, by the natural impressions of Religion, than by any artificial Methods of Policy or Contrivance: So that Politicians promote their ends, not by making but finding Religion in the Minds of Men; for tho' Reason of State may cherish, it can never create the Notion of a Deity.

But

But have Princes or Politicians been more free from the Fears of a Deity, or the Terrors of another World, than other Men? This would be, if Religion were only a Device or Engine of State: whereas we ſee and find the quite contrary, for they have the ſame ſenſe and impreſſions of theſe things with other Men, and can no more rid their Minds of them, than the meaneſt of their Subjects: Hiſtory tells us, how ſome of the *Roman* Emperors were wont to be frighted with the noiſe of Thunder; as thinking it to be the voice of God: We read how *Caligula* us'd to creep under a Bed at the ſound of it, taking it for a ſign of the anger and diſpleaſure of Heaven; and we read of many other great Perſons and States-men, who have been alarm'd with the fears of a God, and the terrors of another World: Now if Religion were only a Juggle of State, or a politick Device of cunning Men; how come they to be thus terrified with their own Contrivance? Men are not wont to be affrighted with Bugbears of their own making, or to tremble at that which they know

to

to be a mere ſcarecrow; 'tis plain, the greateſt and wiſeſt perſons that have ever been, have known of no ſuch Cheat in Religion, for if they had, no account could be given of thoſe fears and troubles of Conſcience, which they in all Ages had about it.

Beſide, 'tis hard to conceive, how all the Princes and Potentates of the Earth ſhould agree together to entertain a Fiction; and tho' they have ſuch different Deſigns and Intereſts, ſhould yet conſpire to deviſe and promote a Notion that is void of all Reaſon or Truth.

Or if they could, how is it to be imagin'd, that the People ſhould be all ſo ready to receive it? They are not wont ſo eaſily to believe their Governours upon their bare Word, or embrace a Notion that hath ſo plain a deſign upon their Peace and Welfare: Yea the more ſubtle and politick they take their Governours to be, the more they are apt to ſuſpect them; and to pry into the Reaſons of their Counſels and Intentions.

Laſtly, if the Notion of a God were only a politick Contrivance to keep the World in awe, or a Device fram'd in

ſome

ſome Mens heads, to cozen others into obedience to them, how comes it to paſs, that this was never diſcover'd in any Age? Sure it would have been found out one time or other; Cheats do not always continue undiſcover'd; Truth commonly breaks out, and Time lays open the Impoſture: if then this pretended Secret was never known or diſcover'd by any, but remains ſtill as much a Secret as ever, we may very well conclude it to be it ſelf a Juggle and Fiction of ſome Mens brain; or a Device of the Atheiſt to cozen and deceive himſelf. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

WHen the Atheiſt is driven out of the Refuge of State-policy, and can neither tell the perſon by whom, or the time when this Engine of State was invented, He flies to

Another

Another Device, which is to reſolve the Notion and Belief of a God into common Compact: An account whereof is briefly this.

That Mankind, for the better preſervation of Human Society, by common Conſent form'd this Notion of a God, which they generally agreed together to embrace; and finding the benefit and good influence of it upon the publick welfare, have by common Compact preſerv'd and kept it up ever ſince: A notable Account indeed! which ſhews that ſome Men will believe any thing, rather than what they ſhould.

However this account farther grants the Uſefulneſs of Religion to the welfare of Human Society, which is indeed ſo neceſſary to it, that 'tis impoſſible it ſhould long ſubſiſt or continue without it; for Religion is the Bond or Cement that holds all the parts of it together, and gives all the force and efficacy to the Laws by which 'tis upheld: All the Obligations of Conſcience, which alone can keep Men to their duty, reſult from the Belief of a God; without which, no ties of Oaths, Promiſes, or Engagements, could hold Men either to Honeſty or Obedience: So that the uſefulneſs and neceſſity of this Notion to the welfare of Mankind, ſhould methinks en-

cline all Men to entertain it, to wiſh it true, and to give all the ſtrength that may be to the Arguments brought to confirm it; for he that endeavours to evade this Truth, is an Enemy not only to himſelf, but to the Happineſs and Tranquility of Human Society, and does what in him lies to deſtroy the Peace and Welfare of Mankind.

But when and where was this general Meeting of Mankind, in which they form'd this Notion of a Deity, and enter'd into this ſolemn Compact to Believe and propagate it? Who ſummon'd or call'd them together from all the remote parts of the World? Or did they happen luckily to come and meet together by Chance? Sure, ſome Hiſtory or other of the World would have Recorded this grand Aſſembly of Mankind for this purpoſe, which, if it ever were, was one of the moſt memorable things that hath been ever acted in it. But ſince no account hath been ever given of ſuch a Meeting, we may conclude it to be a meer figment, to be met with no where but in an Atheiſtical brain.

But if the Atheiſt could get over this difficulty, which is indeed inſuperable, there are many other in this unaccountable Compact, in which he muſt be unavoidably intangl'd; for how came all the inhabitants

habitants of all places and Countries, ſo unanimouſly to jump and agree together in this Notion? When there is ſcarce any little Town or City, where ſuch an entire Agreement is to be found in matters of opinion, how incredible is it that all the People in the World, of the moſt diſtant Places, and the moſt different Humours, Intereſts, and Inclinations, ſhould all agree together in framing this Notion, and ſo univerſally conſpire in the Belief of it?

Beſide, how came this Notion fram'd by them, to be ſo generally receiv'd by all Poſterity ever ſince? was this Covenant and Compact of theirs ſo made, as to bind all their Heirs and Succeſſors for ever? Or how come all Generations ſo readily to take themſelves to be bound by it? eſpecially when no Inſtrument or Evidence can be produc'd, when and where this Argreement was ratified; certainly, this is more than was ever known of any other Compact or Agreement either before or ſince.

Moreover, are there not ſome Places and Perſons ſo rude, as to be without any Commerce or Correſpondence with other Nations? And how came they to hear of this Compact, or to think themſelves bound by it? Sure, they muſt be mighty credulous, who can receive a

matter of ſo great importance upon ſuch ſlender Evidence, and take themſelves to be oblig'd by a Contract which they never heard of; eſpecially in a thing that ſits ſo uneaſie upon the Minds of many, whoſe intereſt and wiſh it is that it were not true: For are there not ſome very deſirous to rid themſelves of the diſquieting Fear and Belief of a God? do not too many labour hard to caſt off this Check, which tends ſo much to reſtrain their Luſts, and abridge their Pleaſures? And if this Belief depended only on ſuch a precarious Contract, contriv'd and made they know not where, or by whom, would they not ſoon find a way to get out of it?

Theſe and many other abſurdities attend this Device, which he that can ſwallow, may be indeed a Man of little Faith, but of vaſt Credulity; he muſt ceaſe to blame any for eaſineſs of Belief, that can give his aſſent upon ſuch ſlender grounds; and if the Atheiſt can build his Confidence upon no better Foundation, he muſt no longer ſet up for a Man of Wit or Reaſon, nor pretend to any other demonſtration, but that of his own folly.

How much more rational is it, to conclude the Notion of a Deity to be a Principle of Divine infuſion, than an Article of Human Contract? and the Belief of it

to

to be rather founded in Nature than built upon Artifice and Agreement? Is it likely that the Idea of a Being abſolutely perfect, infinitely wiſe, juſt, and gracious, the Omnipotent and glorious Maker and Preſerver of all things, ſhould be merely fram'd by Compact? or that the whole World ſhould univerſally agree to profeſs and worſhip ſuch a Being, if there were no ſuch thing? Is not this at once to impoſe upon the Reaſon of Mankind, and to reflect upon the Honour of our Maker, to make him a Creature of our own Fancies, and the Effect of Human Contrivance? There is no Compact but what may be and hath in time been laid aſide; and if this Belief neither hath nor can be totally eras'd, it owes its riſe to a higher Principle, and muſt be more deeply rooted in the Minds of Men. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER IX.

SIR,

HAving ſhew'd the vanity of the Atheiſt's Pleas in accounting for the Univerſal Tradition and Conſent of Mankind in the Belief of a God, if there were no ſuch Being;

I come now to another Device, made uſe of to rid their Minds of him; and that is to deny the Notion and Being of a Spirit, as a thing impoſſible or incredible in Nature, and unconceivable by the Underſtanding: And herein they are the followers of the Sadduces, who denied *Angels and Spirits*, and thereby the immortality of the Soul, *and the Reſurrection of the dead*; which great Articles of Faith are call'd in queſtion, and the Objections againſt them greedily receiv'd and vented by the Modern Atheiſts of our Age, who take the Notion of a Spirit for a vain chimerical thing, that hath no exiſtence but in the deluded Fancies of ſome melancholy and miſtaken Perſons.

Now this disbelief of Spirits is only to make way for the denial of a God, who being

being of a Spiritual and immaterial Nature muſt be ſet aſide together with them. And hence they would perſwade the World, that Men in believing a Deity, are only haunted with an imaginary Apparition, and merely ſcar'd with the Dreams and Phantaſms of their own Brain.

But why may not ſome Beings be conceiv'd to exiſt without Matter, as well as others with it? is Matter, which is but the droſſy part and dregs of the Univerſe, ſo neceſſary and eſſential to Being, that 'tis not poſſible for any to be without it? where lies the contradiction of an immaterial Subſtance, that it ſhould be ſo hard to be conceiv'd? nay, does not the Purity and Perfection of ſome Beings require us to abſtract from Matter in our conceptions of them? and to aſcribe the Excellency of their Operations to a Principle really diſtinct from it? Is not Matter of it ſelf an unactive, dull, and ſluggiſh thing, void of all ſenſe and underſtanding? and does it not require a more refined Subſtance to give it Motion and activity? What is the Body but a dead, heavy, and lumpiſh Carcaſs, without a Soul to actuate and enliven it? neither would the Angels be the nimble and ſwift-winged Meſſengers of Heaven, if they were

clogg'd with Matter, to check and retard their Motion. If we Mount up in our Contemplations to the Supreme Being and maker of all things, we muſt conceive of him as an Eternal, Independant and Spiritual Subſtance, void of all Corporeity and Matter, and ſubſiſting of himſelf, by the abſolute fulneſs of his own Nature; for the Notion of a God implies a Being that hath all poſſible Perfections, and therefore we are ſo to conceive of him, as to abſtract and remove from all manner of defect and imperfection: Now materiality is a great defect in the Being to which it belongs; for beſide that 'tis a clog to its activity, it confines and limits it to one place, and ſo is oppoſite to the Immenſity, Omnipreſence and Omniſcience of a Deity, who as it made Heaven and Earth by his Power, ſo muſt be ſuppos'd to fill both with his Preſence.

Again, Matter makes a thing to be Diviſible, and conſequently liable to Diſſolution, which is utterly inconſiſtent with the Eternity, and other Perfections of the Divine Nature: So that Reaſon wills us to abſtract from the imperfections of Matter in our apprehenſions of a God, and to conceive of him as a Spiritual and immaterial Subſtance.

But

But how comes the Atheiſt to take this for an irrational or unintelligible Notion? Why, he tells us that all the knowledge we have of things, comes from our Senſes; and ſince we cannot ſee or feel a Spirit, nor arrive to the knowledge of it by any of our Senſes, we can form no Idea of ſuch a thing.

But is nothing to be believ'd, but what we have ſome information of from our Senſes? How then ſhall we believe we have a Soul, of which none of our Senſes can give us any information? for if it be at all, it muſt be a Spiritual and immaterial Subſtance, which cannot incur into or be diſcern'd by any of them: Beſide, are there not many noble Effects and Operations that proceed from an inviſible Cauſe? Do we not find, that we can reaſon, judge, and inferr one thing from another, tho' we ſee not the Principle from whence they come? Have we not an Underſtanding, Will, and Affections, to know, chuſe, and affect things, tho' the Spring of them occur not to any of our Senſes? Do we not find a World made and preſerv'd, tho' we ſee not that inviſible hand that firſt did the one, and ſtill continues the other?

Indeed, had we no higher Principle of knowledge in us, than our Senſes, it would be hard to form a Notion of God,

or

or any Spiritual and immaterial Subſtance, becauſe theſe things cannot be the Object of Senſation; but having a ſuperior Principle, that is a Mind within us, that can raiſe us above all groſs and Corporeal Objects; 'tis eaſie to conceive that a Spiritual Subſtance may be diſcern'd by the Mind, tho' it cannot be the Object of our Senſes: Are there not many Truths in all Arts and Sciences, that fall not under the Cognizance of any of our Senſes? Yea, are not the Eſſences of all things inviſible, and diſcoverable only by the Powers and Sagacity of the Mind, which from the outward Effects, can judge of the inward Nature of the Cauſes? The Underſtanding can penetrate much farther into the inſide of things, than our Senſes or Fancy can enable us to do; we find the Mind can and frequently does correct the Errors of Senſe and Imagination, of which many inſtances might be given, if it were needful to enlarge.

But this is ſufficient to make it evident, that there is a higher Principle of Knowledge within us, than that of our outward Senſes; and that many things are knowable and intelligible by the one, that are not convey'd by the other: So that 'tis falſe Reaſoning to infer, that the Mind cannot have a Notion or Idea of a Spiritual and

and immaterial Subſtance, becauſe it cannot be the Object of Senſation.

Again, the Atheiſt tells us, that the Notion of a God ſuppoſes him to be Infinite and Incomprehenſible, and therefore it muſt be altogether unconceiveable by Human Underſtanding, which cannot graſp Infinity, or comprehend what is Incomprehenſible.

But may not the Mind apprehend ſomething of a Deity, tho' it cannot comprehend the whole of him? Is it wiſe arguing, becauſe we have not all knowledge, therefore we have none at all? If we know as much of him, as the greatneſs of the Object, and the ſlenderneſs of our Faculties will admit; that is, if we know him to be a Being abſolutely and eminently perfect, without the leaſt degree of defect or imperfection, is not this ſufficient to create a Notion and Belief of him? There is ſcarce any inferior Being that we can fully comprehend, and becauſe we underſtand not all Myſteries in Nature, ſhall we conclude from thence, that we are quite ignorant, and can have no Notion or Idea of any thing? This will lead to downright Scepticiſm, and make us believe we know nothing. Beſide, we may know as much of him, as 'tis fit for us now to know; we are not at preſent able to receive the full

full knowledge and ſplendor of the Deity, a great part whereof is reſerv'd for the Happineſs of a future State, when *we ſhall ſee God, as he is*; and tho' we here *know but in part, ſhall then know even as we are known*; and therefore 'tis monſtrouſly unreaſonable to quarrel with the Notion and Idea of a God, or think it altogether unconceivable, becauſe we cannot comprehend his infinite Perfections, in this preſent imperfect ſtate, wherein we know but little of any thing elſe.

But how does the Atheiſt account for all theſe noble Effects and Operations of the Mind, without the Notion of a Spirit? Why, by reſolving all into Matter and Motion: For he tells us, that ſome of the finer and more ſubtle parts of Matter, call'd Atoms, being in continual motion, luckily fall into thoſe configurations, by which all this is perform'd without the help or direction of a Deity: And that ſome happen to be wiſer and more knowing than others, proceeds from ſome of thoſe more refined parts of Matter falling accidentally into more happy forms and contextures in them, than they do in others, and ſo inſtead of believing in God, they believe only in Matter and Motion. A great piece of *Subtilty indeed!* to ſublimate Matter into Spirit, and to aſcribe the Noble-

bleſt Acts and Operations in the World, to the moſt unactive and ſluggiſh of all things in it. But whence ſhould Matter have this Motion, which neither is nor hath in it any ſelf-moving Principle? Why, of this no account can be given without ſome Spiritual Being, that muſt give it all its activity. Can dull Matter of it ſelf infer one thing from another, and perform thoſe reflex Acts, which we find in rational Beings? Can it range the Univerſe in Thought and Contemplation? Or dive into profound Speculations? No, theſe things require another and higher Principle, than ſtupid and ſenſeleſs Matter, and owe their riſe to ſome more refin'd, ſpiritual, and intelligent Being.

In ſhort, The Notion of a Spirit is ſo neceſſary to the ſolving of theſe and a thouſand other difficulties, that none but ſuch as are wholly immers'd in Matter can doubt or disbelieve it. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LET-

LETTER X.

SIR,

ANother Device of the Atheiſt, is his taking occaſion from the unequal diſtribution of Earthly Things, to queſtion both the Being and Providence of a God: They ſee Good Men afflicted, and the Wicked in great proſperity; which they think could not be, if the World were govern'd by ſo Wiſe, Juſt, and Excellent a Being as is pretended.

This is a Quarrel of an ancient date, or an old ſtumbling Block, that hath trip'd up the Heels of many: We read of it in *David*'s days, who was himſelf in great danger of ſtumbling at it; for himſelf tells us, that *his Feet were almoſt gone, and his Steps had well nigh ſlipt, when he ſaw the Wicked in great proſperity; that they were not in trouble like other folk, not plagued like other Men; but were luſty and ſtrong, their Eyes ſtanding out with Fatneſs, having as much as heart could wiſh*; whilſt better men than they look'd meager and thin, being pinch'd with want, and *chaſtened every morning*: This made him begin to doubt, whether

whether there were any wiſe and Supreme Being that order'd theſe things: *I beheld* (ſaith he) *the Ungodly flouriſhing like a green Bay-tree*, and the Righteous Man at the ſame time drooping and hanging the head like a whither'd leaf; *verily I have cleans'd my heart in vain, and waſhed mine hands in innocency*: Meaning, that he had taken pains to be Religious to no purpoſe, when others that neglected it, far'd much better than he.

Again, we find theſe things objected in the days of *Plutarch*, *Seneca*, and other Heathen Moraliſts, who by the bare help of Natural Light, went a great way to the ſolving of this Riddle of Divine Providence: Tho' many of the Poets concluded the World to be govern'd by blind Chance and Fortune, from the promiſcuous event and diſtribution of theſe things: And there are but too many ſtill, who obſerving the Miſeries of Good Men, and the Proſperities of bad, are led to arraign the Juſtice of Providence, and from thence to deny the very Being of a God.

But is this any tolerable Plea for Atheiſm? No, in no wiſe; for ſome of the wiſer and ſoberer Heathens have diſcover'd ſuch weighty Reaſons for this kind of dealing with the Sons of Men, as are abundantly ſufficient to vindicate the Juſtice of

Divine

Divine Providence; God's forbearing the Wicked, may be to propound the Example of his Goodneſs and Patience, to give them time for Amendment, to leave them without excuſe, and to make their Puniſhment the more terrible and remarkable at laſt. Beſide,

Their Proſperity is not ſo great as we vainly imagine, for 'tis oft-times embitter'd with the ſting of an evil Conſcience, and attended with fearful Expectations of Wrath, and the Terrors of an approaching Judgment.

Neither are the Sufferings of the Righteous founded on leſs weighty Cauſes; for theſe are no other than the Diſcipline and Corrections of a Heavenly Father, for their future good: They are deſign'd merely for the exerciſes of patience, and the tryals of their Faith and Conſtancy, which if manfully born, will tend to the encreaſe of their Reward, and add a greater weight and luſtre to their Crown of Glory.

Theſe with many other Conſiderations of great Moment, ſufficient to ſolve this difficulty, you may find inſiſted on at large by *Plutarch*, *Epictetus*, *Simplicius*, *Seneca*, and others, to whom I refer you; all which being the plain diſcoveries of Natural Reaſon, render this Objection ſo far from

from any juſt Plea for Atheiſm, that 'tis a plain proof of the contrary, and may make all Men ſay, *verily there is a God, that judgeth the Earth.*

But how then come Men to be ſo miſled by this means; or where lies the miſtake in this matter? Why, this proceeds partly from a fond and immoderate eſtimation of worldly Proſperity; and partly, likewiſe,

From ſome wrong Notions, that are entertain'd about the Afflictions and Miſeries of this preſent Life. For when Men ſo overvalue the good things of this World, as to think it impoſſible for any to be happy without them; and ſo miſtake the Evils and Adverſities of it, as to judge all Men miſerable and unhappy that fall under them; 'tis no wonder, if they accuſe the diſpenſations of Providence, and quarrel with the manager and diſpoſer of them: He that takes Wealth and Honour to be the ſole Rewards of Virtue, and conſequently to be the proper Lot and Portion of Righteous Men, may be eaſily induc'd to complain of the hard fate of good Men, that want them; and he that hath ſuch terrible apprehenſions of Adverſity, as to look upon it as the puniſhment and wages of Unrighteouſneſs, may envy and applaud the good Fortune of bad Men, who

ſo often eſcape them. Now both theſe are groſs miſtakes, and have unhappily led ſome Men into Atheiſm.

To Rectifie which, you muſt know, that Affliction is ſomtimes a greater Bleſſing than Proſperity; the one ſerving to make Men better, the other worſe. There be few that, in *Pindar*'s Phraſe, can κρατὰ πέψαι μέγαν ὄλβον, rightly manage great Proſperity: Yea, too many are undone by it to Eternity, and make that, which was deſign'd for their good, become the Inſtrument of their ruin. But

Where lies the danger of Proſperity? Why,

Firſt, It tempts many unto Pride, and makes them too apt to forget both God and themſelves; *Jeſurun waxed Fat and kicked*, his Abundance made him bold and inſolent, and lifted up both his Heart and his Heel too againſt his Maker: *David* obſerv'd of the wicked that proſper'd in his days, that *Pride compaſſed them about as a chain, and violence cover'd them as a garment*: And this made them *ſpeak of wicked Blaſphemies, and ſet their talk againſt the moſt high*, Pſal. 73. 8, 9. Yea, he himſelf felt ſomething of this Tumour, for he ſaid in his Proſperity, that he *ſhould never be moved*: he began to caſt off all dependance upon God, and to rely only on his own ſtrength:

ſtrength: And therefore we find *Agar* praying againſt Riches, leſt *being full, he ſhould deny God, and ſay, who is the Lord?* Prov. 30. 8, 9.

Again, Proſperity tempts many unto Wantonneſs and Luxury; Men's corrupt Natures too often turning the Encouragements to Virtue, into the incentives to Vice, and making their Plenty the fewel of their Luſt and Vanity. By which means, their Riches ſerve only to inflame their reckoning, and their abuſed Gifts and Talents do but ſink them the deeper into Eternal Miſery: The ſenſe of this rectified the Pſalmiſt's miſtake in this matter, and kept him from grieving or grudging at the ſhort-liv'd Proſperity of the Wicked; for when *he went into the Sanctuary, he ſoon Underſtood the end of thoſe Men; how they were ſate in ſlippery places, from whence they were ſuddenly caſt down, and came to a fearful end*; from whence he learn't rather to pity, than envy that Proſperity, which had ſo fatal an iſſue, and ſerv'd merely to fatten them for the ſlaughter. As you may Read at large in the 73 Pſalm.

But is Adverſity the cure of theſe Evils; and do Afflictions beſt tend to prevent the danger of them? Yes; for theſe help to keep Men humble, ſenſible of their weak-

neſs and dependance upon a ſuperior Power, and make them look up to him, from whom both Trouble and Deliverance come: Indeed Afflictions naturally lead Men to conſider; he that feels the ſmart of the Rod, will naturally look to him that ſtrikes, and conſider too the Reaſon of his inflicting it; and ſince Afflictions ſpring not out of the Duſt, they direct our Contemplations higher, and ſhew us the Divine Hand that ſends them, by which means we are brought to *hear the voice of the Rod, and of him that appointed it*: *In their Afflictions* (ſaith God) *they will ſeek me early*; the Mariners *in a Storm call each upon their God*, whoſe Being and Providence in a Calm they had utterly forgotten: *Before I was afflicted* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) *I went aſtray, but now I have learn't thy Statutes*; *and therefore thankfully acknowledg'd, that God of very faithfulneſs had cauſed him to be troubled*: Adverſity and trouble have reduc'd many, that were miſs-led and corrupted by Proſperity: Riches (ſaith the Philoſopher) are not to be reputed good things, therefore the worſt as well as the beſt have them; neither are Afflictions to be reckon'd evil things, therefore the beſt as well as the worſt undergo them.

Theſe

Theſe things are not only agreeable to, but diſcoverable likewiſe by the Light of Reaſon, to which if we add the greater Light of Revelation in this matter, you will ſee greater cauſe to dread, than deſire Proſperity, and that we ſhould be ſo far from being afraid, or aſham'd, that we ought rather to *glory in Tribulations.* In a Word,

If we rightly conſider the many and great dangers of Proſperity, and compare them with the many and vaſt advantages of Affliction, we may ſoon ſee this ſtumbling-block of the Atheiſt to vaniſh, and that the Proſperity of bad, and Afflictions of good Men, are ſo far from an Argument againſt the Being and Providence of God, that they are a very ſtrong Evidence and Confirmation of Both. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER XI.

SIR,

HAving in my laſt remov'd that ancient ſtumbling-block of Atheiſm, taken from the Adverſities of Good, and the Proſperity of bad Men. I proceed now to a later

Device of the Atheiſt, which is, his taking advantage from the many Sects and Differences in Religion, to lay aſide all; and from Mens Diſagreement about the way and manner of worſhipping God, to ſettle in a total neglect and contempt of him: This is too obvious in experience, to need any proof; for may we not dayly ſee the ſenſe of Religion to wear off from the Minds of Men, by the ſtir that is made about it? Are not the impreſſions of Virtue and Goodneſs mightily defac'd by our Diviſions? So that it cannot be doubted, but the different Sects and Opinions of our Age are a great Cauſe of that Atheiſm and Irreligion that ſo much abound in it: 'Tis too well known, that

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ſome Perſons who have been well enough affected to Religion, and had no ſmall zeal for, and ſatisfaction in it, have yet by falling into the ways of Separation contracted that giddineſs and inſtability, as to loſe all; and by running from one Sect to another, have run themſelves out of breath, and made their laſt reſort into Atheiſm; and others perceiving their claſhing and inconſtancy, have gone the ſame way, and thrown up all.

But what influence have Differences and Diviſions in Religion upon the producing of Atheiſm? Why great, ſundry ways: As, Firſt, Diviſions tend to expoſe Religion, and render it vile and deſpicable; for when Men behold it to ſet one another by the Ears, and to engage them in endleſs quarrels and diſputes, they come to deſpiſe and think meanly of it; and ſo are eaſily induc'd to abandon that which breeds ſo much diſcord and animoſity: They are apt to think, that Religion (if there were any ſuch thing) would be a more peaceable, quiet, and harmleſs thing, and have other Effects upon the Minds of Men; but finding it to create little elſe than fewds and differences among the Profeſſors of it, they come to entertain low and contemptible thoughts of it; and being made only a Bone of Contention, think it good

for nothing but to be thrown away. Again,

2*dly*. Diviſions beget thoſe doubts and uncertainties about Religion, that unſettle Mens minds, and bring them into ſuch a Maze, that they know not where to fix: And in this tumult and confuſion of thoughts, many are tempted to throw up all, rather than wander about in ſuch uncertainties, and loſe themſelves in a crowd of endleſs and diſputable Opinions. Moreover,

3*dly*. Among the numerous Sects and Parties that are in Religion, there can be but one in the Right; for tho' error be Infinite, yet Truth is but one; and where to find this among a numberleſs Sett of Pretenders, is they think a matter of ſo much labour and difficulty, that they chuſe rather to let all alone, than to be at the pains and trouble of ſuch an Enquiry. Beſide,

4*thly*. Some perſons having diſcover'd the folly and falſhood of ſome darling Opinions they formerly admir'd, are thereby induc'd to ſuſpect all the reſt: And others having found out the Cheat and Impoſture of many more, are apt to conclude the reſt to be no better: All which have an eaſie and natural tendency towards Atheiſm,

theiſm, and are made uſe of by many to that end.

Yea all that are indifferent in matters of Religion, and, with *Gallio*, care for none of theſe things (of which the World affords but too many) all ſuch I ſay will be glad to have ſo plauſible a pretence and excuſe for their Irreligion; and they whoſe intereſt and deſign it is to have no Religion, will be ſure to lay hold of this and all other advantages againſt it. In a word, Diviſions naturally deſtroy that Love and Charity which is the *Bond of perfectneſs*, and the life of all true Religion, and likewiſe neceſſarily beget that Hatred, Strife, and Animoſity, that is the ground-work of Atheiſm, Confuſion, and every Evil work.

Now here it may not be amiſs to ſtay a while, and conſider the great Evil and Danger of our unhappy Diſſentions; what unſpeakable miſchief they do in the World, and particularly what an apparent handle they give to Atheiſm, being too great an occaſion for it, and putting too fair a colour upon it. For by raiſing theſe diſputes, they do but raiſe a miſt before the Eyes of the People, whereby many are wrongtided and led into Atheiſm, and harden'd in their disbelief and contempt of all Religion; and there fore 'twas a wiſe and whol-

ſome

ſome piece of Advice of the Apoſtle, to *mark thoſe that cauſe Diviſions and avoid them.*

Neither will it be amiſs, if the Authors and Abetters of theſe Diviſions will ſet down and conſider, what account they will be able to give, for thoſe many and great Evils, that apparently proceed from them: For if we are forbidden to lay any ſtumbling-Block or occaſion of falling in our Brother's way, how will theſe Men anſwer for all that Irreligion that hath been evidently occaſioned by this means? Or what Plea will they make for all that Schiſm and Atheiſm, into which ſo many are hereby betray'd? This is a Conſideration of greater Moment than ſome are aware of; for tho' offences may *and will come, yet woe be to them by whom the offence cometh.*

But are theſe Differences and Diviſions in Religion a ſufficient pretence and excuſe for Atheiſm? No, far from it; for tho' ſuch are accountable to God, that give the occaſion; yet that will not juſtifie or excuſe thoſe that take it; this being an Evil which they are ſufficiently forewarn'd of, and therefore ſhould be forearm'd againſt it: So that all the Atheiſm occaſion'd from hence, proceeds rather from an Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs in the Will, than from

any

any defect of Light or Knowledge in the Underſtanding.

And here we find the Atheiſts, who would be thought Men of the deepeſt reach and inſight into theſe things, guilty of very foul and falſe Reaſoning in this matter: For,

Firſt, What tho' ſome Opinions in Religion have been found to be falſe, will it follow thence, that there is none true? There are ſome that have entertain'd wrong Notions in all Arts and Sciences, yea have maintain'd falſe Problems even in the Mathematicks themſelves; and will any conclude from thence, that they are all lies and falſities? This Principle would deſtroy all knowledge, and lead Men to deny and disbelieve every thing: There have been no doubt Hereticks and Schiſmaticks in all Ages, who have eſpous'd many Errors and miſtaken Opinions about the Worſhip of God; and will any infer from thence, that all Religion is impoſture? Certainly this is very bad arguing, and will lead Men to the heighth of Scepticiſm and Infidelity. Again,

What tho' Men differ about ſome things, will it follow thence that they agree in nothing? And if (as one hath well obſerv'd) their diſagreement be an Argument of the falſhood of ſome things; why

is

is not their Agreement as good an Argument for the truth of other? The differences in Religion are commonly about the Circumſtances of it, as about the Modes of Worſhip and Diſcipline; whereas Men generally agree in the Matters of Faith and Eſſentials of Religion; and indeed there is nothing wherein all Mankind do more univerſally agree, than in the Belief and Worſhip of a God: And is it not unreaſonable, becauſe they may differ in ſome things, to ſuſpect the Truth of that wherein they are all agreed? He that finds himſelf inclin'd to make this bad uſe of Mens diſputes, and to improve theſe petty differences into Atheiſm, may do well to ſit down and conſider how far Religion is concern'd in them, which if he can be perſwaded to do, he will ſoon ſee that theſe things do not affect the Truth and Foundation of it, in which they are all agreed, but only the beauty and ornament of the Superſtucture, they refer rather to matters of Speculation than Practice: And if any have various Sentiments about the Ornaments and Out-works of a Building, ſure that can be no Reaſon either to diſtruſt or ſubvert the Foundation. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LET-

LETTER XII.

SIR,

I Shew'd in my laſt, the perverſe uſe which the Atheiſt makes of the Diſputes and Differences that are found in the World about matters of Religion: I proceed in this to Another Device much like it; which is, his taking occaſion from the Hypocriſie and bad lives of ſome pretenders to it, to conclude all Religion to be falſe, and from thence to fall into Atheiſm and Infidelity.

This is a frequent and fatal practice, of which our Age does afford many ſad and doleful inſtances: there are ſome who will be at no pains to examine the truth or falſhood of any Religion, but take it upon truſt, as the Cuſtom of the Country where they live, or as 'tis deriv'd down to them by their Parents or Anceſtors: Now theſe lie open to all the aſſaults of Atheiſm, and being altogether unguarded againſt them, are but too ready to ſurrender upon any ſummons, and to yield to every temptation to it: Their Faith, for lack of being Catechiz'd and well-principl'd in the beginning,

ginning, hath no firm bottom, but lies wholly in the power of a corrupt and inconſtant Will, which will move as intereſt and inclination lead it, ſo that as ſoon as they become wicked enough, to need Atheiſm for a Refuge, they will be ready to flie to it: And therefore we are bid to try and examine the Truth of Doctrines, and be ready to give a Reaſon of the Faith and Hope that is in us, when ever we are ask'd or call'd to it, that being well-grounded in the Truth of Religion, we may adhere to it againſt all oppoſition, and ſtand the ſhock of the fierceſt Temptations. Again,

There are others, who think ſometimes upon Religion, and make ſome enquiry into it, but yet judge of the truth or falſhood of it, not by the ſoundneſs of its Precepts, but by the Lives and Practices of thoſe that make the greateſt profeſſion of it: Theſe likewiſe to ſave the trouble of a deep and impartial ſearch into the grounds and principles upon which Religion ſtands, enquire what others think of it, who by their pretences ſeem beſt to underſtand it; and becauſe Mens Actions are the beſt diſcovery of their thoughts and opinions of things; they judge of what they think in theſe matters, by what they ſee them do; ſo that when they ſee ſuch

Mens

Mens Practices give the Lye to their Profeſſion, and find them act as as if they did not believe what they ſay, this makes them think that there is no Reaſon to believe it, and that Religion is nothing elſe but a cunning Device, made uſe of by ſome Men to carry on their worldly Intereſt and Deſigns. This no doubt hath drawn many into Atheiſm, and harden'd others in it. The many vile tricks that have been play'd under the Mask of Religion, the gilding of Treaſon and Rebellion with a ſpecious pretence of Zeal for God's Glory, and hiding Faction and Sedition under the colours of Reformation, have made many ſuſpect the whole for a Contrivance, and to caſt it off as a Syſtem of Lies and Impoſtures.

But is it a true and ſafe Rule, to judge of the truth of Religion by the lives of thoſe that profeſs it? No, a very unſafe and crooked one: For,

Though the Hypocrite that plays this game, ſhall dearly rue hereafter for all the Evil done by this means; tho' his portion of miſery and damnation will be heavier and hotter than others, for laying ſuch a ſtumbling block in their way, by which ſo many fall to their Eternal Ruin; yet this will not excuſe the folly of ſuch as ſuffer themſelvs to be miſs-led and betra'y'd

by

by it, nor juſtifie ſuch Atheiſtical Concluſions drawn from it: Example you know is a falſe and fallacious Rule to walk by; for ſince the generality of Men leave the way in which they ſhould walk, to follow them, or infer our Duty from them, is for the moſt to go aſtray.

But they draw this Concluſion (they ſay) not from the looſe and debauch'd part of the World, that have no ſenſe of Religion, but from the ſtricter ſort, that make the higheſt pretenſions to it, and ſeem to have the deepeſt impreſſions of it; and if theſe make it evident by their lives, that they believe little or nothing of it, what can we think of it, but as a mere Deluſion? But do not Men act ſometimes againſt their own perſuaſion? And are not too many carried away by the ſway of their Luſts and corrupt Deſigns, againſt the convictions of their own Mind? That Men ſometimes knowingly and wilfully commit great ſins, and cover vile enormities under a cloak of greater ſanctity, is a matter indeed to be lamented, but cannot reaſonably be urg'd as an Argument againſt Religion: Will any think that a Cheat, becauſe ſome that do ill things are found to be ſo? And if theſe act ſo bad a part, ſhall any be encourag'd by it to act a worſe? Sure this is very bad arguing, and

ſuch

ueh as cannot well be own'd by any, that would be thought Men of Senſe and Reaſon.

'Tis not unuſual for Mens words to be better than their Actions; and in ſuch caſes the wiſeſt courſe is to do as they ſay, and not as they do. This direction we find given with Relation to the Phariſees, who ſate in *Moſes*'s Chair, and ſpake many good things from it, tho' their doings ran counter to their Doctrines; *what* therefore *they ſay, we are bid to do, but not to do after their works, for they ſay and do not.* Certainly, 'tis a much better courſe to learn from others bad lives to amend our own, than to take occaſion from thence to grow worſe, and to caſt off all fear of God from before our Eyes.

Beſide, have not ſome Men bad deſigns to carry on? And do they ſtick at any ways or means to promote them? May not the beſt things be abus'd to evil purpoſes? And is nothing true or good, becauſe it may be made to ſerve bad ends?

Now tho' theſe falſe tricks of Hypocrites, may be a good Reaſon why we ſhould not believe every Spirit, or be carried away by vain pretences; yet they can be no Argument againſt the Truth of Religion, no more than it would be to affirm, that there are no true Diamonds, becauſe

there are ſo many counterfeits. How then comes it to paſs, that ſo many are caught in this ſnare, and miſ-led by ſuch an apparent fallacy? Why, this muſt proceed partly

From ſome Mens averſneſs to Religion, heighten'd by a ſtrong deſire to follow the ſwinge of their corrupt inclinations, and to be freed from any check or reſtraint it might lay upon them. And,

Partly likewiſe, from their too great proneneſs to Atheiſm, which makes them lay hold on any thing, tho' never ſo mean, that may give any countenance or encouragement to it.

In ſhort then, The Atheiſts great aptneſs to draw ſuch bad Concluſions from Lives may be a good Caution againſt all Immorality and Vice, by which the name of God is Blaſphem'd; but can by no means be made a Plea for Atheiſm, or give any juſt Cauſe to diſcard Religion as an Impoſture. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LET-

LETTER XIII.

SIR,

HAving in the foregoing Letters ſhew'd the weakneſs of the Atheiſts Arguments againſt a Deity: I proceed in this to another Artifice he makes uſe of to undermine the Belief and Worſhip of him; and that is to Scoff at and Deride Religion, and if he cannot Argue it, to endeavour to Laugh it out of the World. This is done by thoſe, who would be thought to be the knowing Men and Wits of the Age; who firſt try the ſtrength of their Reaſon, and when that fails, fly to Art to ſupport their Atheiſm, and ſet their Wits at work to Rally and Ridicule Religion.

This is a degree of wickedneſs, which Men are not wont to arrive to preſently, for the Pſalmiſt intimates, that they muſt *walk a while in the Counſel of the Ungodly, and ſtand in the way of Sinners, before they can ſet down and ſettle in the Chair of the Scorner.* Pſal. 1. 1. When they are ſeated there, and accuſtomed themſelves to this vile practice, they ſoon loſe the ſenſe of a Deity, and ſo perſwade themſelves and others

that there is no God, becauſe they have the impudence to ſcorn and deſpiſe him.

But do theſe Men think by Laughter to alter the Nature of Good and Evil? Or that a God of Infinite Power, Wiſdom and Juſtice, will be thus play'd or droll'd out of his Being? Can they hope to prevail by leveling their Blaſphemies againſt the moſt High; *ſetting their Mouth againſt the Heavens, and cauſing their Tongue to walk through the Earth?* No, certainly; this is both a fruitleſs and frivolous attempt, for *he that ſitteth in the Heavens will laugh them to ſcorn, the Lord ſhall have them in deriſion.*

What end then can theſe Men propoſe in ſuch a vile piece of Wickedneſs? Why, this is done,

Firſt, to gain to themſelves the Reputation of being Wits; which they endeavour to do, by expoſing the moſt ſerious things: The life and picquancy of Wit, (as one hath well obſerv'd) lies in the ſurprizingneſs of its conceits and expreſſions; and conſequently to Ridicule things Sacred, which ought in Reaſon to be Priviledg'd from it, is moſt apt to aſtoniſh and ſurprize the hearers; and if any (as light and vain Perſons are wont to be) are thereby moved to Laughter, they are tickled with the conceit

conceit, and thereby pleaſe and inure themſelves to this impious practice.

This way the dulleſt perſons (if they will be Prophane enough) may be eaſily dubb'd Wits, by venturing to ſay thoſe rude things of God and Religion, which no wiſe Man would preſume to utter, and this proves a ſtrong temptation to many who have no other way to be thought witty. Again,

2dly. This is thought by ſome a genteel and brave thing, to go out of the common Road, and to caſt off thoſe fears which others are aw'd and terrifi'd withal; they reckon it a ſort of Gallantry of Spirit, to be above the frights that poſſeſs Vulgar Minds, and to ſhake off thoſe Fetters of Religion, with which the generality ſuffer themſelves tamely to be bound; and the better to break theſe Chains, they labour to break their Jeſts upon them. Moreover,

3dly. This is done to give the better countenance to their ſinful practices and immoralities; for if they can expoſe Virtue, and make Religion ridiculous, they may act their Vices with the greater grace, and follow the ſway of their Luſts without ſhame or controul. Beſide, they think it a good Plea for their Wickedneſs, that they do not therein contradict any Principle they profeſs, they act ſuitably to what

they pretend, and therefore to put the better Face upon their Vices, they laugh at thoſe for Fools, who do not believe and act as they do: Thus by accuſtoming themſelves to ridicule the moſt ſerious things, they bring on a Contempt of God and Religion, and droll themſelves into Atheiſm. But is there any Wiſdom or Safety in ſo doing? No, quite otherwiſe; nothing can be more ſottiſh or dangerous; for all ſuch Mirth is no better than Madneſs, and this kind of Laughter will ſhortly end in *weeping, and wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth.*

We have heard of ſome, that would rather loſe their Friend than their Jeſt; but 'tis ſtrange that this drolling humour ſhould carry any ſo far, as to make them venture the loſs of the favour of God, the beſt Friend and Benefactor in the World, for the ſake of an idle prophane Jeſt, which taints the Air that gives it breath, and either grates upon, or corrupts the Ears of thoſe that hear it.

But becauſe this is become a too frequent and faſhionable practice, and hath betray'd many into Atheiſm; 'twill be requiſite to lay open the folly and danger of it. And, Firſt, if there were nothing elſe, the unpardonable rudeneſs and indecence of this practice, is ſufficient to ſhew it highly unbecoming

becoming any perſon of Senſe or Breeding; for ſince Mankind generally profeſs a high eſteem and veneration for God and Religion, it muſt be a manifeſt breach of Civility and good Manners to ſcoff at and deride them: The Laws of Converſation require to treat all Men with due reſpect; there is none can hear with patience his Father or his Friend expos'd to Scorn and Deriſion; and what an unparallel'd affront muſt it be to Mankind, to make God and Religion (the deareſt things to them in the world) the ſubject of Contempt and Raillery?

Again, *2dly.* The mighty influence which the belief of a God hath upon the publick welfare, may convince any conſidering Man of the great Evil of deriding it; he that deſpiſes Religion, cuts the Sinews of Government, and diſſolves the firmeſt Bond of Human Society; for when Men have laugh'd away the Fear of God and the Senſe of Religion, all Obligations of Conſcience are gone with it, and nothing remains to keep them to their duty, but the fear of Men, which is a looſe Principle that will vary or ceaſe, as opportunity, intereſt, or humour lead it. Moreover,

3dly. To jeſt at, and expoſe Religion, is the groſſeſt abuſe of Wit that can be made of it; for it turns one of the chiefeſt Ornaments of Virtue, into an Encouragement

of Vice, and makes that which was given to recreate the Mind, and ſweeten Converſation, to become the Bane and Peſt of both: Wit (as a great Man hath obſerv'd) is a keen Weapon, as apt for bad as good purpoſes, and therefore a wiſe Man ſhould have the keeping of it, to prevent the miſchief and danger of its ill management.

There is a good uſe of Wit in many Caſes; as to adorn Virtue, and recommend it to the beſt Advantage; to expoſe Vice, and render it as it deſerves, Ridiculous; to ſeaſon Converſation, and to eaſe and relieve the Mind under the burden of its Cares; and whilſt it keeps within theſe Bounds, 'tis a uſeful and commendable Quality; but when it tranſgreſſes theſe Rules, and breaks in upon God and Religion, it loſeth its name, and degenerates into Inſolence and Impiety.

Yea, ſuch as would be thought Wits, by jeſting upon ſacred and ſerious things, do but betray the greateſt folly; 'twas the fool that ſaid in his Heart, there was no God; and *Solomon* tells us, that none but *Fools make a mock of Sin*, or think of *mocking God, who neither can nor will be mocked.* In a word, all prophane Wit is the heighth of folly, and tho' it have never ſo much Salt, cannot be ſavoury, but nauſeous and offenſive to all wiſe Men.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, The unſpeakable hazard the Atheiſt runs in deriding Religion, is enough to ſhew the danger and folly of this impious practice: For if the Atheiſt ſhall find at laſt that there is a God, as undoubtedly he will, what will he ſay for thoſe rude ſcoffs and affronts he hath put upon him? What account can he give for all this impudent Buffoonry? What horrour and confuſion of Face muſt needs ſeize them, when the Maker and Judge of the World ſhall avenge this inſolence upon them, and vindicate his Honour in their Eternal Deſtruction? This is a matter well worth their ſerious and timely conſideration, that they may repent and return no more to this Folly: Otherwiſe, if they will continue to laugh on, and ſcoff at Religion, God Almighty will ſhortly take his turn too, and will *laugh at their Calamity, and mock when their Fear cometh.*

In ſhort then, this drolling upon Sacred Things is ſo far from giving any juſt encouragement to Atheiſm, that 'tis an high Aggravation of the Impiety; and all ſuch Mirth will end at laſt in the deepeſt Sadneſs. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LET-

LETTER XIV.

SIR,

I Proceed now to the laſt, tho' none of the leaſt Artifices to ſupport and countenance Atheiſm: For when the Atheiſt is beaten out of all the former ſubterfuges, he hath recourſe to another Device, ſuggeſted to him by his ſenſual Luſts and Appetite. And that is,

To charge Religion with a fooliſh Bargain; and that ſuch as embrace it, act upon ſlender and inſufficient Motives. To prove which, they tell us,

That to part with preſent Certainties, for uncertain Futurities, can be no Act of Wiſdom; for in doubtful Caſes the greateſt Evidence ſhould ſway: Now we are ſure (ſay they) of what is preſent, but can never be ſo of what is future; and therefore he charges it with folly, to deny themſelves the preſent Pleaſures, Profits, and Honours of this World, for a few vain Hopes of better things in another, which perhaps may never come to paſs, and of which none could ever yet give them any certain Evidence.

This

This, tho' own'd indeed by few, is yet the Senſe and Language of moſt mens Lives and Actions; which ſhew them to be fond to exceſſe of theſe Earthly enjoyments, but to have little or no regard to the weightier Concerns of Heaven and Eternity, and, with Martha, *to be cumber'd about many things*, with the neglect of the *one thing neceſſary*. The Epicures Song is, *let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*; the preſent time is ours, and all that we can call ſo; for the time to come, we know not whoſe it may be, and therefore 'tis wiſdom to enjoy what we are ſure of, and not to defer or ſuſpend our happineſs upon any ſuch future uncertainties.

But *be not deceiv'd* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *Evil Communications corrupt good Manners*; yea ſuch vain communication corrupt mens Minds, debauch their Reaſon, and makes them act like Fools, when they would be thought to talk moſt wiſely. For,

Firſt, The preſent Enjoyments of this World, (how confidently ſoever we may call them our own) are infinitely vain and uncertain, and when we think to enjoy moſt of them, frequently leave and lurch our expectations: *Riches take to themſelves wings and fly away*, when we think to hold them faſteſt: The Pleaſures and Delights of the

the World are all fleeting and momentany, yea they are imbitter'd with a Sting, and mingled with Sorrow: Honour is a puff of wind that is quickly gone, and he that admires these things, sets his heart upon *that which is not*: So that the Atheist is mistaken in his Supposition, for these present things are not so certain as he takes them. Neither are they so much the Happiness, as the Trouble and Misery of human life: the wicked Man knows many times that he plays the Fool in gratifying his Lusts, and owns that he ought to do otherwise; he feels a regret and trouble upon his mind, and does not so much enjoy, as disquiet himself in indulging of them. However,

The Atheist here tells us, that the pleasures of this life affect his Senses, he feels himself in some measure pleas'd and delighted with them; and why should he abridge himself of such sensible Delights, for Future Things, of which he hath no tast, and can have no assurance?

As for the pleasures of Sense, they are in the most innocent use of them vastly exceeded by the pleasures of Virtue and Religion; for these have a sweeter Relish on the Mind, and leave far more lasting impressions of joy and satisfaction, than any sensual Delights ever did or can do: And if

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this pure delight flow at laſt *into fulneſs of joy*, and run into *thoſe Rivers of pleaſure, that are at Gods right hand for evermore*, there is infinite Reaſon why we ſhould abridge our ſelves in theſe ſenſual Enjoyments, for the fruition of a far more glorious and durable Felicity.

But ſtill the uncertainty and want of Evidence for theſe things ſticks with the Atheiſt, and makes the parting with the one for the other a fooliſh Bargain; for we never ſaw (ſaith he) nor experienc'd theſe things our ſelves, nor ever ſpake with any one that did.

But what kind of Evidence is it, that he would have of theſe things? I hope he does not expect more than the nature of the thing will bear, for that would be unreaſonable, and ſhew him to be both unwilling and uncapable of Conviction. Now God being a ſpiritual and conſequently an inviſible Subſtance, cannot be prov'd by the Evidence of Senſe, for *no man hath ſeen God at any time.*

Neither can a future ſtate, which commences not till after this life, be at preſent viſible, or fall under the tryal or experience of any of our Senſes: ſo that this kind of proof cannot in Reaſon be requir'd in this Caſe, neither can the Atheiſt exact it without wounding his own Cauſe; for neither

ther can *Epicurus*'s Atoms, nor *Ariſtotle*'s Eternity of the World be prov'd this way.

What Aſſurance then have we of theſe Truths? Why, we have the proper, that is a Moral Aſſurance, grounded upon the evident and neceſſary deductions of Reaſon, which is ſufficient to beget a confident Perſwaſion of the truth of them, and to remove all doubts and diſtruſt to the contrary.

In ſhort, we have as great an Aſſurance of theſe Things, as 'tis poſſible for us to have, ſuppoſing that they are true, which is enough to ſatisfie any reaſonable man in the belief of them: Let us ſuppoſe then that there is a God, that is a Being of all poſſible Perfections; how may we come to know or be aſſured of it? Why, not by the Evidence of Senſe; for being a Spirit, he cannot fall under the Cognizance of any of our Senſes; the only proof we can have of him, muſt be either from ſome ſecret impreſſions of him upon our Mind, or from ſome viſible Effects and Operations, that can only be aſcrib'd to ſuch a Being; and both theſe we have in this Caſe. Again,

Suppoſing there be a future ſtate for the Rewarding of Good, and Puniſhing of Bad Men, what proof can we have of it? Why, none from the evidence of Senſe; for things future and at a diſtance are incapable of that kind of proof; all the Aſſurance we can have of it, is from the Attributes

and

and Perfections of the firſt Cauſe and Maker of all things, whoſe Truth and Faithfulneſs hath declar'd it, and whoſe Mercy and Juſtice neceſſarily require it; for ſince the Obſervation and Violation of his Laws, are not uſually rewarded or Puniſhed in this life, there muſt be another ſtate where the honour of thoſe Divine Perfections will be more openly and throughly vindicated.

The truth is, 'tis not want of Light, but mens ſhutting their Eyes againſt it, that miſs-lead's them in this matter; 'tis a falſe heart that ſuggeſts theſe doubts, and a corrupt Will that pretends lack of ſufficient aſſurance: For Men dayly act upon far leſs Evidence in all other matters, and venture their Lives and Fortunes upon things that have no higher than this Moral Certainty; what wiſe Man ever doubts, whether there be ſuch a place as the *Indies*, *Spain*, or *Turkey*, tho' perhaps he never ſaw either? Do not many transfer their Eſtates by way of Traffick into Foreign Countries, of which they have no other knowledge, than from the Teſtimony and Relation of others? And he that ſhould refuſe to believe or act upon this kind of Certainty, would be reckon'd no better than a Fool or a Mad-man: And if this ſort of aſſurance be ſufficient to juſtifie our diſcre-

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tion in the affairs of our Body; why ſhould we diſtruſt it in the matters of our Soul; eſpecially ſince 'tis not poſſible in our preſent ſtate to have any higher?

But tho' this Evidence (ſaith the Atheiſt) be ſufficient in Temporal Matters; yet a greater Certainty is requiſite in Divine Things, and the weightier Affairs of Eternity. Now tho' this be not wanting to all that are willing to receive it, yet what Reaſon can be given, why that Aſſurance which guides Men in the purſuit of a Leſſer Good, ſhould not influence them much more to obtain a Greater; And that Evidence which is ſufficient to prompt them to avoid Temporal Evils, ſhould not more ſtrongly encline them to eſcape thoſe that are Eternal.

In a Word, The vaſt odds that is on the ſide of Religion, ſhews it to be far from a fooliſh Bargain; for if there be no God or a World to come, the Good Man can be no loſer, for he only parts with his Luſts, which are the ſhame and ſcandal of his Nature, and inſtead of following them, is directed to do what is moſt for his health, intereſt, reputation, and every way moſt conducing to the Peace and Comfort of the preſent life: But if there be a God and a future ſtate, as 'tis more than ten thouſand to one there are, he will be vaſtly

vaſtly a Gainer, for beſide the preſent quiet and ſatisfaction he enjoys here, he is ſecur'd of everlaſting Peace and Tranquility hereafter, and for the poor periſhing trifles of Time, which he now parts with, ſhall be rewarded with the ineffable Joys and Glories of Eternity; and ſure no wiſe Man will charge this with Folly: For if he who hath exchang'd Pebbles for Pearls, is by all thought to have made a wiſe bargain, he that parts with the light *Momentany things* of this Life, for an *Eternal Crown of Glory* in a better, will in the end be found to have made a much wiſer. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

LETTER XV.

SIR,

I Have in the foregoing Letters, according to promiſe, ſet forth ſome of the principal Arts and Devices, that are made uſe of to ſupport and countenance Atheiſm; and likewiſe, according to your deſire, laid open the Evil and Danger of them.

But becauſe the Requeſt of your Letter extended not only to the Cauſe, but the Cure of Atheiſm; it will be requiſite, for a Cloſe, to ſubjoyn ſome few Directions to

that end. And here what hath been ſaid touching the Riſe of this Evil, may help us to find out the Remedies of it; for as to know the Cauſe of a Diſtemper, is a fair ſtep towards the Cure, ſo to diſcover the Devices of Atheiſm, is the readieſt way to prevent the Danger, and to be preſerv'd from the Contagion of it.

But becauſe the Riſe of this Evil is more from the Will and Affections, than from the Mind or Underſtanding, we are to apply our ſelves rather to rectifie the former, than to inform the latter; for Men are not Atheiſts ſo much for want of Knowledge, as for lack of a due Uſe and Application of it. And therefore the

Firſt and Grand Preſervative againſt Atheiſm, muſt be to mortifie and ſubdue all ſinful and ſenſual Luſts, for theſe give the ſtrongeſt byaſs to this Evil, and draw too many into it: We obſerv'd before, that a vicious life makes it Mens intereſt that there be no God, and that makes it their wiſh, and ſoon after their belief that there is none: This is the common and ordinary Road to Atheiſm, and is indeed that *broad way, that leadeth to Deſtruction*; which being ſo eaſie, and ſuitable to Mens vile and vicious Inclinations, many there be that *find and* walk in it.

But that we may not loſe our ſelves, and walk

walk on for Company to our own ruin, we are to get out of this broad way, and betake our ſelves into the ſtraighter paths of Mortification and Self-denyal, which lying croſs to Mens wicked and corrupt affections, is the true Reaſon that few there be that find it. 'Twas wiſely obſerv'd by a great Man, that the main Reaſon why any Man becomes an Atheiſt, is becauſe he is a wicked Man, and reſolves to be ſo: Religion would curb them in their Luſts, and therefore they caſt it off, and put all the Scorn they can upon it: So that to cure this Malady, we muſt, in the Prophets Phraſe, *ceaſe to do evil, and learn to do well*: This will take off that wrong byaſs that turns ſo many out of the way, and likewiſe ſet them right in the way that *leads to everlaſting life*.

Secondly, To prevent this growing Evil, let us often meditate upon the admirable Frame and Fabrick of the World, and ſet apart ſome time for the Contemplation of the wonderful Works both of Creation and Providence; theſe will afford ſuch plain Evidence and Demonſtration of a Deity, that 'tis ſcarce poſſible for the moſt profligate Perſon, that will conſider, to overlook them. I have already ſhew'd you the vain Attempts of the Atheiſt, in going about to ſolve the *Phænomena* of the World without a Supreme Being, either

by affirming that it had no beginning, or that it had its beginning from Chance, or Fortune, both which are attended with ſuch Abſurdities, as are too groſs for any, but an Atheiſts Faith to ſwallow; for which way ſoever we turn our ſelves, we meet with the plain Prints and Footſteps of a Deity.

If we look upward, the *Heavens declare the glory of God, and the Firmament ſheweth his handy Works*; thoſe glorious Luminaries of Heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, which by their conſtant Influences cheriſh and enlighten the World, mind us of that great Father of Lights, that plac'd them there; the exquiſite Order, Beauty, and ſteady Revolution of thoſe Heavenly Bodies, which come forth *like a Bridegroom out of their Chambers, and rejoyce as a Giant to run their Courſe*, are ſo many daily and Ocular Demonſtrations of a Supream Being, that firſt ſet, and ſtill continues them in motion.

If we look down upon the Earth, and behold the admirable Frame, Order, and Contrivance of all things in it, we may plainly ſee that of the Apoſtle verified, that God *hath not left himſelf without witneſs*; every Creature bearing their Teſtimony, and directing our Contemplation to him.

If we take a view of our ſelves, and behold the curious Needle-work and Con-

texture

texture of our Bodies, we may ſee there the Finger of a God; and with the Pſalmiſt break out in admiration of the infinite Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs of our Creator; to which, if we add the conſideration of the wonderful Frame and Faculties of the Soul, we may ſee the Image and Superſcription of our Maker ſo viſibly ſtampt on it, that any conſidering Man may know whoſe it is, and whence it came.

If we go lower, to the Creatures ſubjected to Man's Dominion, we ſhall find the Birds of the Air ſinging forth the Praiſes of their Maker, the Fiſh of the Sea declareing the Wonders of the Deep; and all the Beaſts of the Field, ſo many Heralds and Inſtruments of his Honour. Yea, if we deſcend to the loweſt rank of Creatures, and behold the Herbs, the Graſs, and the Flowers of the Field, we ſhall find Divinity almoſt viſibly Imprinted there; the Beauties of the Roſe and the Lilly, which without any toyl or ſpinning are array'd in that natural gayety and bravery, that exceeds all the coſtly Attire of *Solomon*, are plain Inſtances of the Wiſdom and Care of a Heavenly Father, who thus *cloaths the graſs of the field*, and provides ſo wonderfully for all his Creatures.

Theſe are noble Subjects for our Meditation; in which we are admirably aſſiſted

by a late Learned Diſcourſe (of Dr. *Pelling*) concerning the Exiſtence of God, wherein the ingenious Author hath ſo excellently diſplay'd the abſtruſe Myſteries of Nature, and the Wonders both of Creation and Providence, as is ſufficient for ever to ſilence and baffle all the Attempts of Atheiſm: And therefore I ſhall add no more on this pleaſant Subject, but refer you to it.

Thirdly, To prevent this Evil of Atheiſm, let us hearken to the voice of Conſcience ſpeaking within us, and beware of ſtifling the notices or good motions of it: If we turn our Eyes inward, and conſult our own breaſts, we ſhall find ſomething there that ſecretly tells us when we do well, and when we act amiſs; when we do that which is meet, right, and our bounden Duty, we find a calm and ſerenity upon our Mind, that chears it with unexpreſſible delight and ſatisfaction: When we do what we ought not, we find ſomething within that doth reprehend and fly upon us, yea, and gaul us too with remorſe and anguiſh; inſomuch that there is none, how wicked ſoever, but finds ſometimes a Reluctance in his Spirit againſt bad Actions, even when his corrupt Paſſions, Deſigns, and Inclinations draw him moſt ſtrongly to them.

Now this proceeds from the ſecret calls and

and whiſpers of Conſcience, which is a kind of Deputy ſet up in every Man's breaſt, to preſerve the Memory and Fear of a Deity: And therefore, we are to take heed how we deſpiſe the Calls and Admonitions hereof, for this will lead to a ſear'd Conſcience, and that to Atheiſm.

Fourthly, To avoid this Evil, we muſt (as much as poſſible) avoid all Atheiſtical Diſcourſe and Company, for theſe are too apt to infuſe bad principles into mens minds, and to inſtil even the poiſon of Atheiſm: Cuſtom you know and Company have a mighty influence upon Mankind, and always leave either good or bad impreſſions behind them: if we converſe with wiſe men, *Solomon* tells us, we ſhall learn Wiſdom; we ſhall be benefitted by their Diſcourſe and Example, and as one Coal kindles another, ſo we may receive heat and warmth from their Piety and Devotion: but if we delight in the Converſation of looſe and vain Perſons, we ſhall learn their practices, and inſenſibly loſe the very Principles of Religion; corrupt Communication naturally tends to corrupt good manners; frequent ſwearing and curſing take off from the Reverence that is due to the Divine Majeſty, and the lewd Talk and Example of bad company gradually wear off all impreſſions of Virtue: Vice is infectious, and communi-

cates its venom and malignity to ſuch as come near it, and therefore we are to keep at a diſtance from it, and to have *no fellowſhip with the unfruitful works of darkneſs, but rather reprove them.*

Fifthly, To be arm'd againſt Atheiſm, we muſt labour to be well grounded in the Principles of Religion, and not to take up our Faith upon Truſt without Examination. A Tree (you know) that is not well rooted, is liable to be ſhak'd with every wind; and ſuch as are not well-grounded in their Religion, are eaſily toſs'd to and fro, and carried about with every wind of Doctrine: He that for want of inſtruction is unable to give a Reaſon of the Faith that is in him, will be as unable upon any aſſault to give any Reaſon why he ſhould keep it; and ſuch as take up their faith only upon truſt, will be as ready to lay it down again, when a ſtrong temptation calls for it.

If you obſerve it, 'tis the uncatechiz'd and ill-inſtructed part of Mankind, that fall into irreligion, and are carried captive by infidelity; ſuch as theſe, for want of being well ſeaſon'd in time with pious and ſound Principles, have nothing to hold them; ſo that as they grow up, if their Temper be Sanguine and Jolly, they fall into Lewdneſs and Debauchery; if more ſour and melancholy they fall into Phanaticiſm and Diviſions; and both, tho' going different ways,

ways, meet at laſt in the Center of Atheiſm: Again,

Mens ſhifting of Principles, for want of ſteadineſs in Religion, and varying from ſound and receiv'd Doctrines, is undoubtedly a great occaſion of Atheiſm; for when Men openly relinquiſh what they have publickly maintain'd, it makes many call in Queſtion the Truth of Religion it ſelf, and to think that all other parts of it have no better grounds than that which they have rejected as groundleſs; and tho' it be unjuſt in any to take this offence, yet 'tis no leſs unſafe for any to give it. Wherefore,

Sixthly, To prevent this Evil, we muſt beware of being ſeduc'd or drawn into Sects or Parties, for this hath begotten that giddineſs and inſtability, that hath ſhak'd the Faith of many, and unawares led them into Atheiſm.

Religion hath its Name from binding, and its chief Deſign is to keep Men firm to their Duty to God and Man; now the relaxing of this Bond, lets Men looſe in both, and that brings on Diviſions in point of Worſhip, and Corruptions in point of Manners; both which naturally lead to Irreligion and Atheiſm; and therefore the Wiſdom and Piety of a Nation is beſt ſeen in preſcribing good Laws to prevent all looſeneſs and extravagance in both: and as 'tis the Duty of Superiors to

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Countenance a well-eſtabliſh'd Religion, by encouraging the Obſervers, and puniſhing the Tranſgreſſors of it; ſo is it the unqueſtionable Duty of Subjects to keep cloſe to the Rules of it, without corrupting its Doctrine by Hereſie, or breaking its Unity by Schiſms and Diviſions.

Seventhly, To put a ſtop to Atheiſm, we muſt take care to frequent the ſolemn Worſhip of God, and diligently obſerve the ſtated Seaſons of publick and private Devotion; the neglect of this hath been an unhappy occaſion of the growth of this impiety; for the many preſſing Affairs of this World are apt to croud in upon our minds, to engroſs too much of our time and thoughts, and thereby to beget an utter forgetfulneſs of God, and the greater Concerns of another life; to prevent which, God Almighty, to keep up the Remembrance of himſelf for our own good, hath appointed ſome ſolemn Seaſons, in which he hath requir'd us to reſt from all our worldly Cares and Labours, that we may the better attend his Worſhip and Service. Now the obſerving of theſe Seaſons will help to take off our Minds from an inordinate purſuit of this World, and fix them on a better, 'twill recollect our ſcatter'd Thoughts, and preſerve a due Senſe of Piety and Religion; the publick Inſtructions of thoſe Seaſons ſerve to awaken and

ſtir us up to our Duty, and our Zeal is increaſed by the concurrence and example of each others Devotion; by which means the Senſe and Fear of God is ſtill kept alive in our Minds.

Whereas by a careleſs neglect of Pulick Worſhip, God is in a manner excluded out of all our Thoughts, we become wholly immers'd in the Cares and Pleaſures of this Life, and ſo naturally ſink into Atheiſm and Impiety. So that to continue ſound and ſerious in Religion, we muſt carefully frequent the Publick Worſhip, and be mindful likewiſe of the Seaſons of private and ſecret Devotion, for theſe will withdraw our Minds from ſenſible Objects, which are too apt to enveigle us, and lead to the Contemplation of Divine and Heavenly things, by which alone the Senſe of God and Religion can be preſerv'd.

Eighthly, To this we muſt add the Exerciſes of a Holy Life, without which the ſenſe of Religion will inſenſibly wear off and decay: A Profeſſion of Piety without Practice, is like a Tree without Fruit, which commonly dies away, or elſe is cut down and caſt into the Fire; to make a fair ſhew of Religion, without a ſuitable Converſation, is but to deny God with the greater Solemnity, and however ſuch may ſeem to flatter him with their Lips,

they

they Read a Lecture of Atheiſm in their Lives, and cauſe the Name of God to be blaſphem'd. And therefore, that we may not deny God, we muſt *deny all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and live righteouſly, ſoberly, and godly,* in this preſent World. Theſe *fruits of righteouſneſs will redound not only to the glory of God,* but to the Credit of Religion, which is beſt kept alive both in our ſelves and in others by this means; *the light of ſuch good works will ſo ſhine before men, as to make them glorifie God in the day of viſitation*; Examples are wont to have a greater force than Precepts; and moſt Men like Sheep are apt to go rather *qua itur,* than *qua eundum*: And therefore great heed is to be taken to our ways, that we do not by bad Examples draw any from the Truth, or miſ-lead them into the paths of Errour and Wickedneſs: And as this ſhould be obſerv'd by all Men, ſo more eſpecially by ſuch as have any higher Station in Church or State, for theſe are like a *City on a Hill,* which lies open to the view of all, their actions are more viſible and exemplary, and leave either a good or bad influence behind them, which ſhould make them the more wary and circumſpect, that they give no offence, or be unto any an occaſion of falling: By this means we ſhall baniſh Atheiſm, and keep Religion in the World, and thereby at once adorn our Profeſſion here, and ſe-

cure

cure the Reward annext to it hereafter.

Laſtly, To cure this Evil, let us often ponder upon the extream Folly and Danger of Atheiſm; the frequent and ſerious Conſideration whereof may help to fortifie our Minds againſt it, and incline us to hate and abhor ſo vile an Enormity.

Now the Atheiſt's Folly is ſeen in the badneſs of his arguing, and his Danger in the badneſs of his acting.

Of the former many inſtances have been given already; to which I ſhall only add one more, to wit, That the Atheiſt, in going about to prove there is no God, attempts to prove a pure Negative, which all wiſe Men know to be not only abſurd, but impoſſible, unleſs where the Being of a thing implies a Contradiction; there indeed a Negative may be prov'd, for 'tis good Reaſoning, that a thing is not, becauſe it cannot be; but where the Being of a thing is not impoſſible, as none ever yet pretended the Being of a God to be; there, unleſs our Minds could graſp the Knowledge of all poſſibilities, and comprehend all things that are or may be, ſuch Reaſoning muſt be abſurd and inconſequent; for more things have an Exiſtence in Nature, than in our Underſtanding, and many things are and may be which we know not of. Again,

The Notion of a God implying a Being that hath all poſſible Perfections, to deny ſuch

ſuch a Being is (as one hath well obſerv'd) to aſſert a poſſibility impoſſible, which is a flat contradiction. Moreover,

To deny that God is, is in effect to affirm it impoſſible that he ſhould be; for Eternity being an Eſſential and inſeparable Perfection of a Deity, he muſt have been for ever, or elſe he cannot be at all; ſo that if he be not now, he cannot begin to be; it being abſurd to affirm of a Being that hath no beginning, that it may begin to be, which is another of the Atheiſt's Contradictions, and ſhews him guilty of bad Reaſoning with a witneſs.

Neither is the Folly of his arguing more apparent, than the Danger of his acting: for he throws himſelf upon the greateſt of all Hazards, upon the greateſt of all Uncertainties, which is a matter never enough to be conſider'd and lamented.

All that the Atheiſt builds upon, is, that 'tis ſomewhat a doubtful Caſe, whether there be a God or no, and that Men may do well enough without the Belief or Fear of him: But who but a Mad-man would run ſuch a hazard, and ſtake down his immortal Soul on ſuch a Peradventure? In all doubtful Caſes, a thing may as well be as not be, and therefore matters are to be well weigh'd on both ſides, eſpecially if they are of Conſequence and unalterable; in which Caſes our Duty and Wiſdom is to incline to that ſide, that hath the beſt

beſt Evidence, and the leaſt Hazards.

Now for the Being of a God there are many weighty and preſſing Arguments, and as much Evidence as can be if he were; againſt it, there is no proof pretended, nor is it indeed capable of any; And which way now ought a prudent Man to determine his aſſent?

If there be great Conveniences and no Danger on the one ſide, and if there be no Conveniences but vaſt Hazards on the other, 'tis eaſie to ſee on what ſide all wiſe Men ought to incline: If there be no ſuch Being as a God, 'tis much for the Convenience of Mankind to believe and act as if there were, for hereby the publick Peace and Order of the World, together with every Man's private Benefit and Comfort are beſt preſerv'd; and there can be no inconveniences in ſuch a Belief, but the caſting off a few ſenſual Luſts, which ſerve only to make the preſent life troubleſom and uneaſie; and after this life, ſuppoſing there be no other, the good Man will fare as well as any: But if there be a God and a future ſtate after this, the Conveniences of Religion will infinitely preponderate, for they that believe and ſerve him will be eternally happy; and they that disbelieve or neglect him ſhall be eternally and irrecorably miſerable.

To conclude all, The Notion of a God being ſo evident, ſo weighty and ſo re-

ceiv'd

Let us make him the sole Object of our Trust and Affiance, repoſing all our Confidence in him, and committing our ſelves to him in well-doing.

In a Word, Let us in all reſpects demean our ſelves towards him, as becometh Creatures to their Creator, paying him the conſtant Tribute of Religious Worſhip that is due to him, and ſerving him truly all the days of our Life; ſo ſhall we begin our Happineſs here by theſe imperfect eſſays, which will be compleated hereafter in the Eternal Fruition and Adoration of him: Which is the hearty Wiſh and Prayer of,

SIR,

Your Faithful Friend and Servant,

A. B.

FINIS.